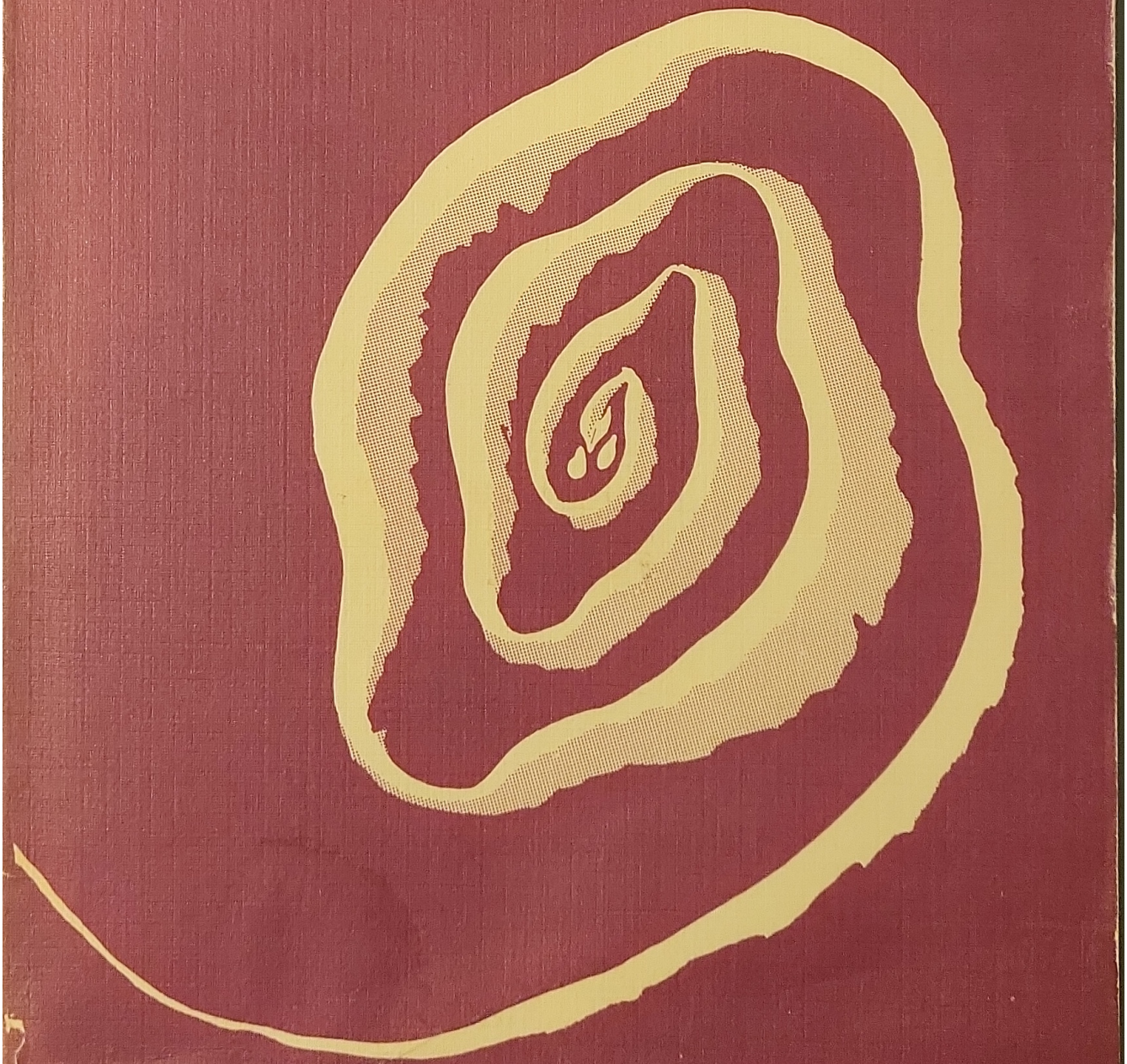
Ripening

An Almanac of Lesbian Lore and Vision



by Lee Lanning and Vernette Hart

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Lesbian Lore and Vision

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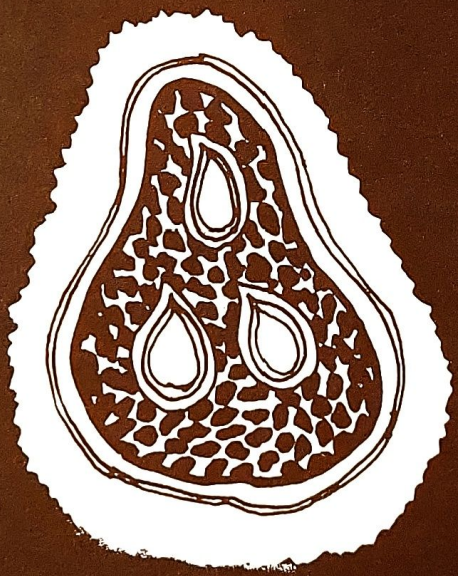
We are coming into our own—our own lives, our own dreams, our own reality. We are leaving behind that which is not ours, which has never been ours. We are moving. We are moving light. We piece together what we know. We make our own patterns. We exchange with one another images that envision our lesbian reality and give us hope.

We are sharing our images in fragments. Weave them together, add your own. There is much more to be said, many connections to be made. The images we live with are changing/changing us. We see, within us, what can be. We trust ourselves, we believe in what we see. Believing in our reality, it is real.

Lee Vernette

early winter



The Days are short; we yearn for the light. Winter is a long journey inward, a time for drawing into/drawing from our natrual resources, when most change takes place imperceptibly. Yet it is a season in which the starkness of the environment brings clarity; the structure of the tree, the shape of the land which the vegetation had concealed is now revealed.

We see the cycle: there is death preparing for rebirth, the newness of life which comes only from the letting go of the former. We suspend the structures that have kept us, the rationality as well. The boundaries in our lives blur. We are alone. We rest, hibernate, draw in. There is nothing to be done. We tend to survival. What is alive is alive within us. We incubate. We dream. Powerful visions of the future well up from the source deep within us all. We ponder. We seek to understand the meaning of what we know, how it quickens our lives.

We are fluid. The earth is fluid. The outlines are distinct but the substance is mutable. We see the whole, the oneness. We flow. the germs of newness are within us. The earth swells with the wetness, the waters gathering for new life. We can see the realness of what we have incubated. It will grow as the seeds grow in the earth.

We name the newness to mark its reality, to confirm it, not to confine it. We initiate. We begin. We call ourselves by what we have named ahead of us, what we move toward. We make public our intent; we make communal our awareness. We move from within ourselves toward the presentation to the community of our unique self.

We are full of ourselves, full of promise. We reach out to others. We acknowledge our love for them. We renew the bonds between us that may have broken when we felt less elastic. We affirm what makes us strong together.

We cleanse ourselves before the planting time. We examine the quality and expressions of our relating. We rid our bodies of wastes. We wash. We drink tonics. We fast. We rid our surroundings of cast offs. We prepare. We consume the last of the winter staples. We air our bedding. The season of death is ended. We are fresh.

WINTER SOLSTICE

(date varies each year between December 20-23)

The sun seems to stand still, the days are the shortest of the year, the nights the longest. In preparation for the rebirth of the sun and a new solar year, we observe a day which is not on our calendars (a lunar year of thirteen lunar months leaves us with one day of "chaos".) We stay at home, doing no weaving or work except cleaning house and throwing away old, unwanted possessions. Within ourselves we also experience a cleansing away of the old in preparation for the new. We take long, hot baths and drink herb teas.

On solstice, we light a fire, kindled with the remains of the solstice fire the year before. We feed the fire with oak and fruit wood. We play mirrors upon the fire to symbolize the sun's reversal and the dispersal of darkness. We choose an evergreen outside our homes and hang it with bits of fat and seeds for the birds and small animals. The evergreen symbolizes life and growth at a time when all is dormant. We feast and dance around the fire. We shake the sistrum, a rattle-like instrument containing four things symbolic of the elements: earth, air, fire, water. With this we realize the importance of motion, of shaking things up, for change. We leap over the fire, making a wish for the coming year, a wish for change.

IN THE BACKGROUND

Winter solstice traditionally commemorated the birth of the sun goddesses, Lucina and Athar. A yule log was lit and burned for seven days. The day it was carried out was considered the unluckiest day of the year. The ashes from the fire were scattered on the fields and a piece was saved to kindle the following year's yule log.

In Anatolia, an evergreen tree, symbol of life amidst apparent death, was hung with the fleece of a ram. The fleece contained fat, seeds of wheat and grapes, and prayers for health and abundance to Anat. Pine boughs have long been used during the solstice season, as have mistletoe, holly and ivy.

In Japan, winter solstice marks the return of the sun goddess Amaterasu Omikami from her cave retreat. She is lured out by an eight-sided mirror hung in a tree, where she sees her own image and the brilliance of the sun is renewed.

In Rome, a wommon-only festival for the Bona Dea ensured prosperity and well-being for the coming year. Bona Dea was a goddess of healing; she used sacred snakes and herbs to cure disease in wimmin, revealing her secrets only to wimmin. (This festival was probably the wimmin's alternative to the saturnalia which was marked by unrestrained disorder, vice and crime.) In Greece, Haloa, the merry wimmin's mysteries was also held in December.

In Scandanavia, twelve days around solstice were the holiday of Hulda or Holle. She was the goddess associated with spinning, weaving and the cultivation of flax. During her days, no flax was spun. Solistice still marks the Scandanavian new year.

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Through ritual we make something real—our conscious awareness of what is happening inside us is expressed in a tangible way. Ritual acts spring from our need to make sense of things and our need to feel connected with the whole. Through ritual we explore our relationship with nature, our source, our relationship with ourselves as we develop, and our relationship with our community.

Rituals are often cyclical in awareness of the cycles of life, often located on the calendar, thus have a repetitious nature. At the same time, rituals are spontaneous, responding to the community's needs. Ritual is a special time, a break in routine, a chance to leave the rest of the world behind. A celebration holds elements of mourning as well as rejoicing, contains the sacred as well as the social, may include fasting prior to feasting, meditation before revelry. We may wear special clothes, go to a special place, eat special foods. We invoke the past, we envision, we probe our dreams, our hidden depths. We experience ourselves on another level—we are mysterious. We are one with our energy, our creativity is unbounded. We are renewed, we are whole, all is harmonious.

A ritual may be a communal celebration, a time to reunite our community, to reaffirm our committment to each other and our way of life. We share and replenish our energy. We indulge in playfulness and fantasy, we let down barriers, abandoning restraints—we are freed, we are healed.

A ritual may be individual—a form we use in relating, a process we go through with ourselves. We may feel the need of a ritual to mark a particular time in our life: menarche, childbirth, menopause, coming-out, naming, separation from family or lived one, death. We may create reoccurring, cyclical rituals, as with every menstruation, at the full moon, or even each morning.

WINTER: TIME FOR . . .
storytelling
quilting
weaving
making soap
hibernating
singing
envisioning
laughing
protecting each other from the cold
taking hot baths
snow shoeing
patching old clothes

LORE

(Anglo-Saxon lar: teaching, what is taught, learning)
All the knowledge of a particular group, especially of a traditional nature. Our Lesbian lives, how we live, what we pass on one to another, our traditions, the sum of what we know, how we know.

While it is true that discomfort or uneasiness can make us shift our position, does it then follow that tension is necessary to bring about change? Do we grow only when we are agitated? Do we need something to struggle against? Isn't it possible that our best learning, growth, change, takes place in the positive, in peace, with pleasure?

LESBIAN LORE

Sappho, best known as a poet writing of her love for wimmin, lived 2500 years ago on the island of Lesbos. She and her companions, the hetaerae, were part of a sacred society of wimmin bound by special ties who celebrated wimmin-only festivals.

REALITY CHECK

As the world I grew up in took on more of a sense of unreality, as I began to question everything I has been taught was "true", I lost my frame of reference. I knew what I didn't believe, yet rarely dared to believe in what I thought was real. As I found others who shared my reality, I began to trust my own perceptions, and formlessness took a shape. Now when I'm confused I have a place in myself, with other and in some corners of our world, where I can do a reality check–is this mine, is this what I believe? I ask what reality I am operating under at the time, under whose system I feel wrong or crazy. To live in my own reality can be comforting, and it can be terrifying. It is the belief that I am not the only one here that makes it possible for me to trust, create and live lesbian reality.

We choose many of our days of celebration by watching the sun and the moon. At Equinox, the sun is directly over the equator, at Winter Solstice it is at its most southern point, at summer, the most northern. We measure these angles and mark them with rocks, making a wheel of the seasons (as the ancients did at Stonehenge and places just being discovered in the U.S.) Each year we see when the sun has reached its most southern point and we celebrate Winter Solstice and the sun's journey northward. Each season is thus marked.

We watch the moon's waxing and waning nightly and plan rituals for the new and full moons and sometimes for the quarters. We endeavor to stay in tune with these powerful influences.

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Consciousness is the making available to one's system of thoughts/actions what is known deep within oneself. Coming from inside it is the unconditioned. We witness our truths and in doing are not satisfied to deny their reality in our living. Consciousness is always self-consciousness: it has no other source. To be aware of oneself is to resource in one's self, to find one's source.

Alone

being myself, by myself

making no demands on myself

Silent

thinking, unthinking

sinking into myself

Holding me, hoarding me

Letting me out

my feelings, my sounds

moving

All of me and all for me

Endless time, endless space, endless energy

An abundance of me

"our own desire . . . is inseparable from our power in the world, because desire must be the beginning of all action."

Susan Griffin, Rape, The Power of Consciousness, Harper and Row, 1979

SEEING IS BELIEVING
Envision a time of solitude, of going within, of familiarity and discovery, solace and growth.

ANTICIPATION

There is a kind of gracelessness toward life that insists we live "realistically", for the moment, in the present, that denies the power of the future within the present, that imprisons us in linear time. We who are seeking within ourselves a fuller meaning, another vision, live with the anticipation of something else, something more. We have taken the future for fact ahistorically.

To anticipate is to dream with the assurance that we can make real what we want. To anticipate is to regard as accomplished what we strive to do as we are doing it, to make inviolate the unfolding vision, to claim the rightness of the movement. When we speak of our future as true and established we have set the process in motion. The thought is active.

Living actively in anticipation gives us a place to live, a place of our design, an order of our concerns. We then have a base from which to evaluate their concerns as they affect us without losing our grounding. We make our own reality by making "real" what we choose.

○ ○ ○

To be spiritual in any sense of the word is to be free to be one's own authority, to be able to authenticate experience, name reality FOR ONESELF.

○ ○ ○

Elk gather in shelter of trees 2-3 days before a blizzard.

LESBIAN LORE

Semiramis was an Assyrian queen 9000 years ago who invented and wore trousers so she could move about freely.

A lunar month is 29½ days, from new moon, through full, to new again. The waxing moon is a "right hand" crescent ☽ increasing to half (called the first quarter), and to full ○ . The moon's visible shape then begins decreasing, or waning, to half (third quarter) ☾ , to a "left" crescent ☾ , until on the night of the new moon, it is dark.

"The strong aura

of the Self

will protect the Self."

Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology, Beacon, 1978

OUR BLOOD

All women have an instinct for solitude. To ignore this is to lose one aspect of consciousness. Therefore women have separated themselves during menstruation in order to give attention to this aspect rather than conventional demands. This is very healing, allowing us to gain closer contact with our instinctive forces, to go down into our self. Menstruation is a time to experience the powers within ourselves.

Our behavior is affected by magnetic disturbances in the atmosphere, by solar flares, sunspots. A widespread feeling of excitement with no apparent cause may be due to our relationship to the sun.

REFLECTION

(Latin flectere: to bend)
to turn or divert to a certain course, change course
to bring back from estrangement
to bend, turn, fold back
to throw or cast back beams of light (of bodies smooth or polished)
to cast credit or blame
to turn one's thoughts on, fix one's attention upon

how she reflects
how she bends/moves/changes
how she turns back to herself/deviates
how she throws back light on the path

LESBIAN LORE

Wimmin who served Venus burned frankincense and myrrh to keep the love of wimmin.

WIMMIN KNOWING

The sources of our knowing are deep, nonlinear, inclusive, wholistic, multidimensional and resourceful. We know as we learn to trust our sources of knowing.

Old English yields two words from the root cunnan—to know, be able: cunt—an Old English word for vagina, and cun—to know, to learn to know, inquire into, explore, investigate, to have experience of. From this comes the word now out of use, ken—to know, a range of vision or knowledge, a capacity of seeing, mental perception, recognition, and keen—sensitive, perceptive, sharp-witted, eager. The verb to be able—can/could from the root cunnan is still in use, and the word that describes the knowing of wimmin—cunning—skillful or ingenious, has this rich derivation. Is cunnilingus a knowing tongue?

Sophia, translated from the Greek as "wisdom", was regarded as the highest form of feminine wisdom, spiritual in effect. It was compared to a single delicate flower; its power was creative, self generating, self discovering. It represented unity, the root of all things. Later this wisdom was regarded as soft, circular, convoluted, so that sophism, sophomore, sophisticate, sophistry, all have a belittling effect in common use. Yet the love of this wisdom is the root of philosophy.

Anglo-Saxon wittan—to know, and wit—knowledge, expressed the world of perception, sensation and experience as outwit and the knowledge from within the self as inwit.

Sage, the wise wommon and the herb are said to be derived from the Latin verb sapere—to be wise. Saga in Latin is a witch. We also have sagacious—far-sighted, clever, cunning, and sagacity.

Even lunacy which the OED describes as "the tendency to set at naught first and most frequently the optional and then the obligatory rules of conduct", has its origins in our intuitive knowing inspired by the moon and our communion with its powers.

The sibyls spoke in rhyme; the sphinxes taught by way of riddles. The knowing within us must be drawn out, experienced. If we do not "know" it within us it is not our way of knowing. We grow in trust for ourselves. We are eager for experience. We learn in our own way. We have our reasons.

"Their language started from the sounds of their passion, their curiosity in intimacy and the longer sounds of giving birth."

Elana Dykewoman, They Will Know Me By My Teeth, Megaera Press, 1976

Mary Daly (Gyn/Ecology, Beacon, 1978) advises us to "pare away all that is alienating or confining." We peel off layers like an onion—only as we do it, we are not diminished, but enlarged!

We don't simply reject their symbols, their meanings, we remember and invent our own. We "move out of their reach into our own time and space" (Mary Daly). This is not a fantasy for the future, it is something we can do now. Our need for meaning, for our lives, cannot wait. We are taking the time and space—we are becoming ourselves.

LESBIAN LORE

The Beguines were wimmin who, from the 12th to 15th centuries in Northern France and Germany, lived independently. Their spiritual, social and economic lives were of their own direction. At their height they comprised up to a quarter of a city, living together, renting and bequeathing property to one another. The wimmin were largely working class, depending heavily on spinning for income. They also did nursing, washing, baking, teaching. Thy formed their own craft guilds to bargain with the city and church.

We take our time. We have time in our hands. We do each thing in our own time, beginning when it is our time to begin, ceasing when we are through, when our process is complete. We are thus connected to the task as we are doing it. We do not take "more" time to do it, nor do we do it in "less" time. It is done in the time that it takes to begin and end our connection to it. We maintain our own rhythm. We have time on our hands.

LESBIAN LORE

The major purpose of taboo is to separate spheres too similar to each other in order to affirm their existence on separate symbolic levels. Thus whatever is separated from us by taboo, i.e., menstuation, sacred functions, mathematics, it is because of our power in that time, place or activity being too overwhelming.

Sòlitude is the only base from which we can build community. To embrace solitude is to know the fullness of one's power of being and the sufficiency of that power. We are whole people, wimmin unto ourselves. We each know we can rely on our selves; therefore we are reliable within the community.

DREAM DAYS (January)

January and February were long thought to be a lost or dead time of the year. The days were not counted or the months named before 713 bc and were omitted from the Roman calendar after that time. It was a time of slowing down, looking in, purifying for the new agricultural year. The Iroquois use this time for dreaming and storytelling.

We take this time to dream, to envision the world we want. We know our visions are powerful. We know a dream of things to come, taken seriously, will bring those things about. We know visions develop in a state of idleness . . . in sleep, in silence, in isolation, in darkness, our dreams incubate. We brood, as a hen with an egg, until our visions break through.

We encourage sleeping dreams by placing mugwort (also called wormwood or artemesia) and anise in our pillows. We know our dreams are influenced by our surroundings. Sleeping together, we affect one another's dreams–we may meet in our dreams, share images or feelings. We know we can influence our own dreams by suggestion before we fall asleep. We encourage "daydreams" by opening our psychic centers–we eat safron, poppy seed, brewer's yeast. We inhale the fumes of burning laurel, as did the sibylline prophetesses.

We share our dreams, our visions with others. We tell all the parts even those we do not understand or think have meaning. Someone else may see in our telling what we only know in our depths. We discover in our dreaming how much we know, how real our vision is.

"livin dreams'll make ya crazy
livin dreams'll lead ya to the
end /s of yrself"

Ntozake Shange, Nappy Edges,
Bantam ed. 1980

CARING FOR OURSELVES
We have ourselves and the dream to nurture
When we nurture ourselves we feed the dream
When we nurture the dream we feed ourselves

When we need a vision we go to a place that is healing and restorative for us. We sleep in that place as many nights as it takes for our vision to show. Then, we may return to our usual places healed by our vision and with a vision for our lives.

My visions of what I want for the world, for wimmin, for myself, are a beginning. It is my desire–knowing what I want–that gives me energy, and enables me to act. My visions for the future guide my life now–I believe in them, I act in ways that support their realization. These are my visions–add yours to them. Our individual dreams build our collective vision.

I WANT to be able to look in the mirror and love myself.
I WANT wimmin to love themselves and each other, to value, truly, our wommonness, the strength of our femaleness.
I WANT the love of wimmin to be passed from mother to daughter.
I WANT to love, and be loved, openly and honestly.
I WANT to heal and be healed.
I WANT to be strengthened in comfort and pleasure as well as through work.
I WANT closeness with the earth, free of domination. I want to learn respect from the natural world.
I WANT a place for us–a wommon-loving world, where our primary work is wommon-loving–learning it in ourselves and affecting others with it, seeing wimmin as valuable, to ourselves, to others, and to the earth.
I WANT a place where I can be myself without interruption, with love and support. I want also to provide that place for others.
I WANT to reach out of myself, to other wimmin.
I WANT us to love ourselves and each other, I want us to always put that love first–to be very deliberate in our analysis of priorities, and very honest.
I WANT us to to take ourselves seriously–what we dream and what we do does make a difference.
I WANT us to believe in ourselves as survivors, to trust our strength.
I WANT a sense of kinship, of tribe, with lesbians.
I WANT to know, in myself, that what I'm doing is 'important' and 'right' within my value system. I want to believe in myself, my ways and my work.
I WANT to be secure in my beliefs, unthreatened by others' beliefs, and to be surrounded by others secure and unthreatened.
I WANT the patience to know we're not there yet. I want the impatience to keep going. I want not to settle, but always be looking.
I WANT to find a vehicle for my searching, a concrete way of learning and expressing a way of life, a work that encompasses my values and circulates them.
I WANT a work from which and for which I must learn honesty and wommon-loving; one in which I must always see myself and others.
I WANT a work that is subjective–where I am the subject, the active initiator. I want to put myself into something–really be me while doing it, and producing something that is revealing of me.

I WANT women to work with, to learn with. I dream of a sharing of purpose, a working together out of love for the task. A oneness even in our diversity, a common belief in the worth of our work, a striving toward a vision, making it real.

I WANT my life to be a whole—a weaving of all the strands into one ethic for the life of the earth and wimmin.

I WANT

We are learning to tell stories. Our stories remember real events, experienced a long time ago. Our stories tell of something beneath the surface, things we all know but seldom speak of. Our stories tell of something missing in our lives today, our connections to the earth and to each other. As we share our stories, our reality widens—we share new words, new meanings and visions of stories to come.

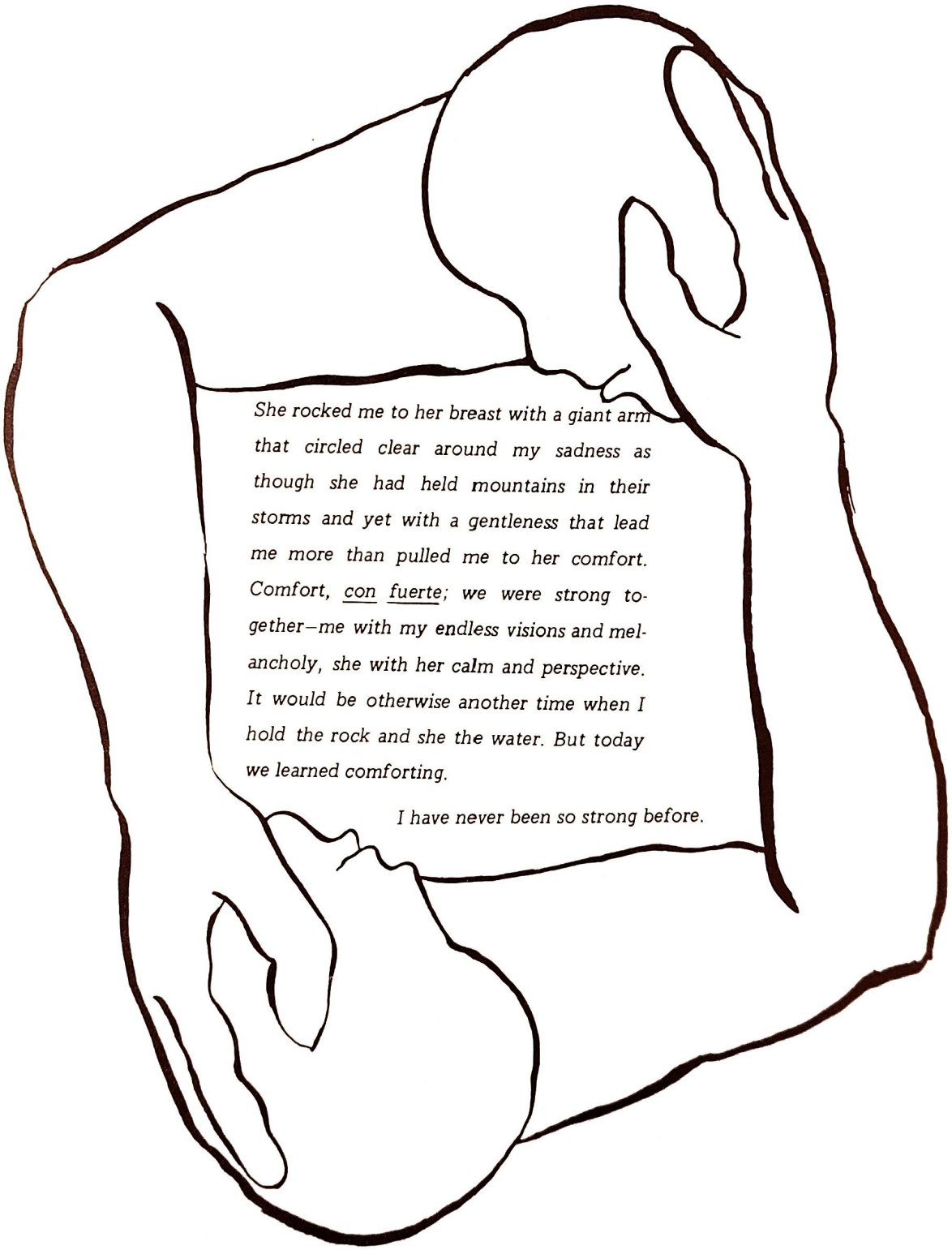
"It is in our idleness, in our dreams, that the submerged truth sometimes comes to the top."

Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own, Harcourt Brace and World, 1929

WIMMIN'S WORK
Our work is dreaming . . . envisioning what might be

We say we remember when there was only sacred time, when there was no ritual because there was no separation of our unconscious and our conscious, our collective and our private. We did nothing to induce dreams; we saw in many dimensions at once all the time. We did not set time aside for emotion and healing and celebration; that was what occupied our days. We did not invoke the great spirits; we lived among them.

We say we have ritual now to remember these days, but that again there will be only sacred time and we will have no ritual. That is why each ritual is new, done the same only once. We are moving. We are bridging the separations.


She rocked me to her breast with a giant arm that circled clear around my sadness as though she had held mountains in their storms and yet with a gentleness that lead me more than pulled me to her comfort. Comfort, con fuerte; we were strong together—me with my endless visions and melancholy, she with her calm and perspective. It would be otherwise another time when I hold the rock and she the water. But today we learned comforting.
I have never been so strong before.

LESBIAN LORE

The spindle is a symbol of female identity and wisdom. It is the core on which is wound our self knowledge. When we spin we unravel our experience making a strong fiber with which we weave our patterns.

WIMMIN'S WORK

We grow flax whose fiber may be spun and woven into linen cloth. Only wimmin may sow its seed and as we do so we expose our genitals to the flax and say as wimmin have said for centuries, "Please grow as high as my genitals are now". The flax comb, or weavers reed, whose teeth separate the individual threads has long been a vaginal symbol, representing wimmin's sexuality in rituals. Weaving itself has been considered a ritual act, a secret guarded by wimmin.

LESBIAN LORE

In Japan, there is a story of Amaterasu Omikami who keeps a great hall in which wimmin live and spin and weave called the Weaving Hall of Heaven within the celestial palace.

LESBIAN LORE

Harmonia is said to weave the starry sky.

OUR TONGUE

Language creates reality. What one experiences is not the same as what one expresses, but the process of language, of giving words to feelings, thoughts, events establishes a relationship between these experiences and others. We make/recognize patterns by using the same word to describe two different events. These patterns are how we see the world, the framework we use to understand/include new experience. The matrix of relationships of one thing to others creates reality. This is why we form our own words for concepts that belong to our reality: we have no "old" words that can convey our meaning. We wish to make new connections.

"Though we move silently, separate, can you hear our joint voices singing . . . "

Martha Courtot, Tribe, Pearlchild, 1977

CONSCIOUSNESS

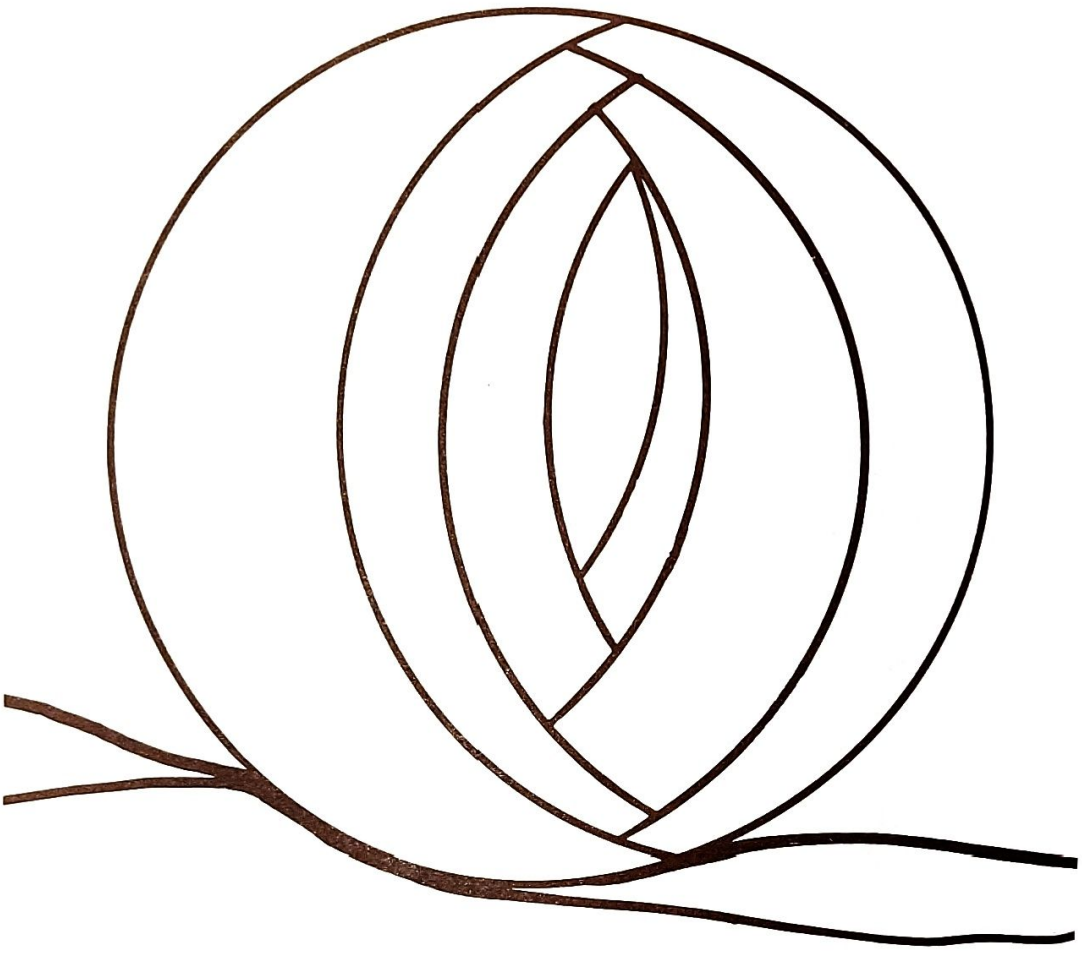
Latin scire—to cut, to know + con—with, together, therefore to know with, or con as the intensive—to know within, know deeply

Consciousness is both an intimate knowing and a communal one. We have, in English, added the word -raising to convey what is intended by this knowing. In Spanish conscientizacíon and in Portuguese conscienticaõ refer to the process in which those who have never had the tools or the analysis to speak the reality they experience, develop both in a praxis of dialogue. Those who discover together what they know within themselves to be true are capable of supplying both the form and the content. Those things which we know intimately need no donated formula with which we can speak them in order to be valid.

Knowing in this sense is a cutting away. (Scion, concise, incisor, scissor all come from the same root.) Such differentiation is not valueless. We never "know" something in a void; we always "know" something within the context of what we believe, what constitutes authority for us, what is the meaning of such knowing. Consciousness means that as wimmin we begin our validation within our deepest selves; we judge, adopt, discard all information according to how it seems to us. For critique we entreat other wimmin to share their process, their perceptions, their analysis and language.

Consciousness is not a hierarchical concept. We may know different things. We may know some things more intimately. We may know some things more exceptionally, exclusively or particularily. But we're not ranking our knowing or talking aout "higher consciousness". Such talk leads inevitably to a denial of personal experience in favor of a "universal" experience, which removes us both from the process and the intimacy of the connection between what we know and our deepest self.

The goal of our consciousness is our selves. What we need most to discover lies within our collective and individual wommon selves. The process should not alienate us from ourselves, make us feel insignificant, or compartmentalize us. Knowing as consciousness should bring more of our reality in tune with our deep wommon source.



We see the earth's rhythms are circular.
We see we live in cycles, we recognize our own cyclical nature.

We watch the turning of the seasons, the cycles of the sun's light on the earth

how increasing light affects the earth's fertility

how spring and summer bring increased female fertility, human and animal

how light affects our glands, in summer's light, the thyroid producing a hormone which reduces body heat, in winter darkness, the pituitary and pineal glands are affected, decreasing conception, shortening the menstrual cycle

how winter darkness in its extreme can cause anxiety, madness, by interfering with calcium absorption

how spring and fall, times of seasonal transition, bring increases in ulcers, asthma, allergies, depression, manic-depression

how animals, in fall's decreasing light, increase their fat deposits to prepare for migration, hibernation, or a hard winter

We watch the waxing and waning of the moon's light

how the light of the full moon controls ovulation, the dark of the new moon inducing menstruation
how the tides, our body fluids, our bleeding are affected by the moon
how a full moon often means wet weather
how seeds are able to take in more moisture at the full moon
how eruptions, swellings on the skin are said to increase with the waxing moon, decrease with the waning moon
how our whole epidermal layer of skin is shed and renewed every 29 days, just the time it takes the moon to go full cycle
how the moon reflects a high percentage of ultraviolet light from the sun and how this light can purify water and heal living things
how a lack of moonlight may result in poor health
how the cycles of the moon affect our body's cycles and thus affect our behavior, our ability to act

We watch the daily turning of the earth, creating day and night

how our bodies have a circadian rhythm of temperature, blood content, hormone production, urine production, brain chemicals, cell division, sensory acuity, as well as our familiar cycles of fatigue and hunger
how our peak performance time is when our body temperature is highest
how our low ebb comes during the 'wolf hours' before dawn, when pulse rate, respiration, blood pressure, blood sugar, immunity, are all low
how our sleep renews us—how our cells divide, growth hormones are released, how we dream of new solutions for our waking life
how plants also 'sleep', having a time of rest when they allow their leaves to drop
how this rhythm is vital to our physical and mental health
how stress can lead to desynchronization of our body's rhythm
how a regular schedule can restore harmony in a sick body

We know our cycles—seasonal, monthly, daily. We turn with them.
We are one with the turning, not endlessly circling, but spiraling in close loops, ever renewed and growing.
We see our changes are natural.

WHAT GIVES US ORDER

light: sun—day and seasons
moon—month
stars—generations
life cycles of vegetation
life cycle of animals
menstruation
endurance of friendships
memory
vision
aging
seasonal weather cycles
migration of birds, hibernation, seasonal activity of animals
completion of tasks/projects
justice/equality when it is natural
trust, predictability of others
our own identity—that in all our changes, we recognize ourselves as far back as our first memory

WHAT GIVES US ENERGY

conscious eating
purposefulness of what needs doing
loved companions
time alone
time for feeling
positive thoughts and actions
relaxation and rest
feeling grounded
creative work
sunshine
changes in season, weather
flowing water, living trees
sex

WHAT GIVES US HOPE

shared vision
the encouragement of others
feeling alert, healthy, whole
a sense of movement
group efforts such as working together, singing
creative visualization
sufficiency—in ourselves or among us
tangible wonders like rocks, shells
knowing we have it all within us
confidence that what is within us is "right" and "good"

LESBIAN LORE

Nemesis is the daughter of the night. Her righteous anger burns against those who violate the order of nature. Any who holds no reverence for nature should not go about in the dark.

We are wild.

Pigs squeal before a blizzard.

WORD PLAY

We play games to open the boundaries of our minds, to stimulate our imagination, to create new connections within ourselves and with others. In word play, we realize the possibility of our own language.

Playing Rabble, we use a scrabble board and our imagination. We draw as many letters as will fit on the tray. We make up words for concepts within the lesbian reality. We play any word we can pronounce and define. We do not keep score.

Variations of scrabble: We play for content, not points, using familiar words.

1. Erotic scrabble: All words must have a sensual/sexual connotation for us or we must be able to explain how that word is erotic. We play in bed.
2. Wimmin's culture scrabble: All words we use must embrace the female principle.
3. Nounless scrabble: We use words that describe our relationships, actions, interactions—words that are not restricting or limiting.

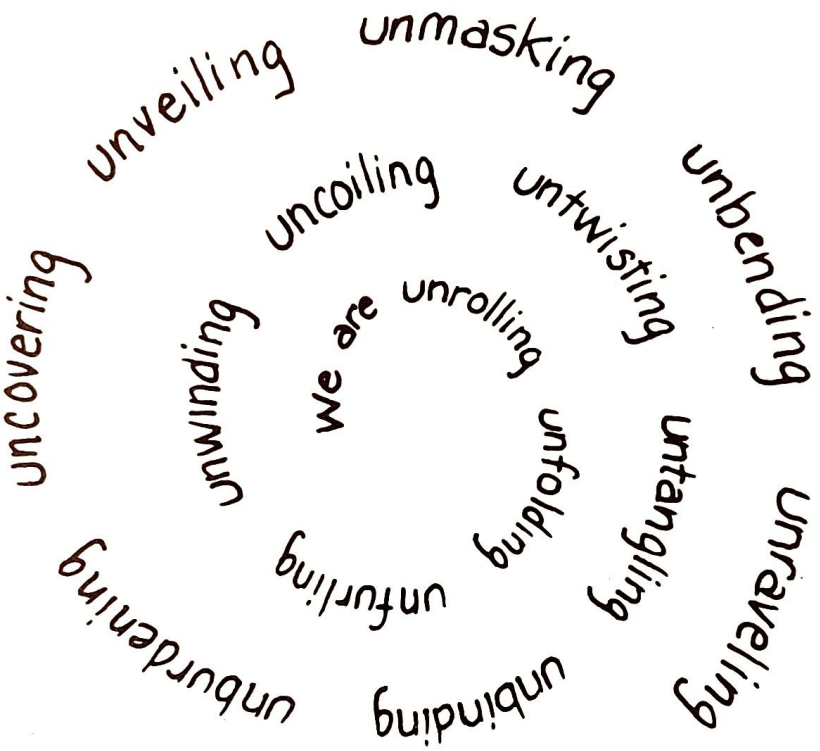
WIMMIN'S WORK

Wimmin invented work. Our nurturing chores were the first important work. We planted and harvested grain, we pounded corn, we preserved food, we dried skins, we combed wool, we wove cloth, we made pottery vessels.

We live within the framework of our own lesbian consciousness, outside of !†+$%/&* reality. We consciously seek and form our own consciousness. We search for our origins, for the wisdom of wimmin who earlier sought their own consciousness. We form our own language of words which reflect our value and our knowledge. We tune ourselves to the earth, seeking our connectedness with the natural world. We envision our lives. We actively create our own future.

○ ○ ○

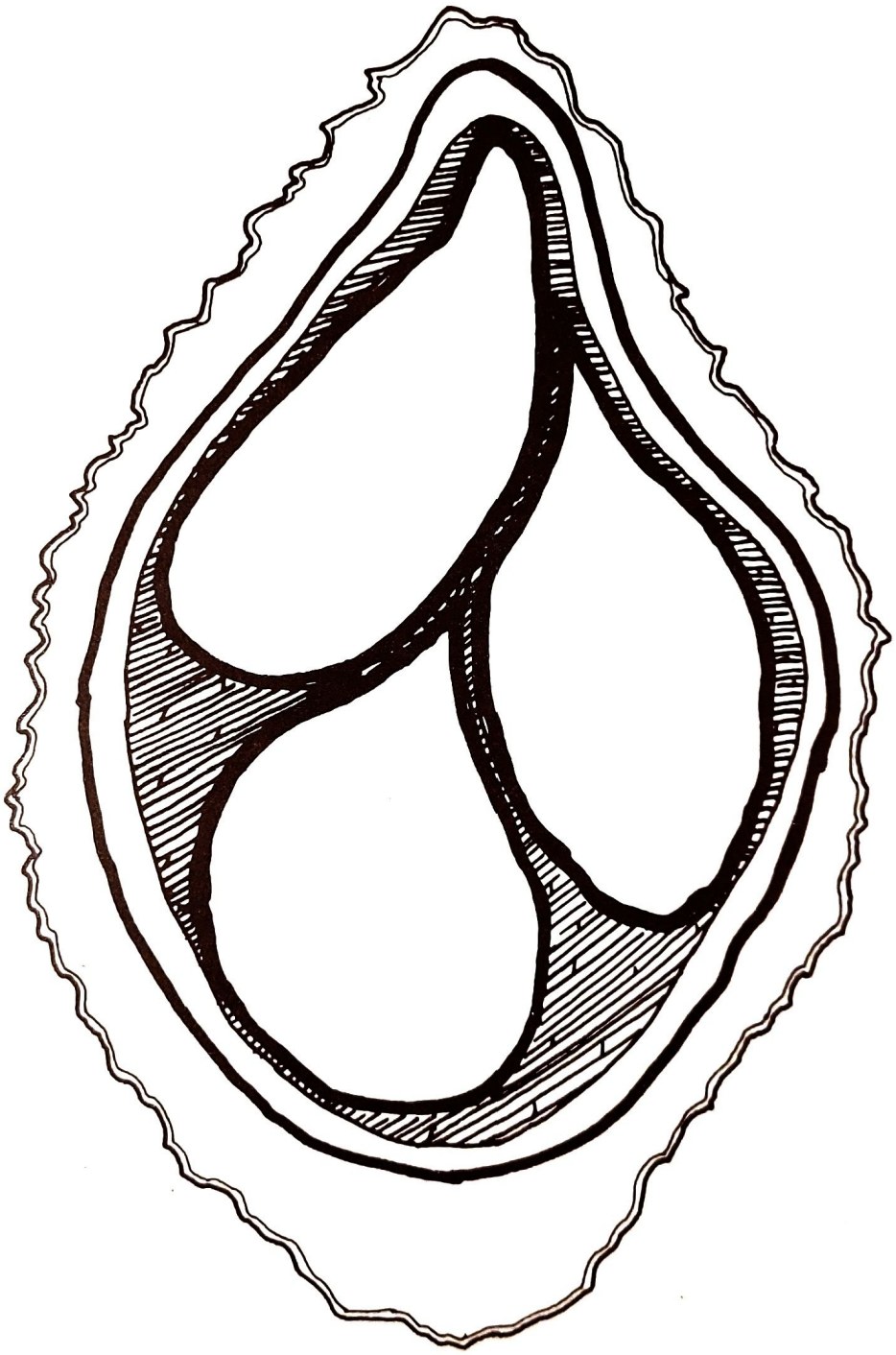
We give energy to what holds our attention. If we attend to priorities that are not our own, we divert energy from ourselves. If we become inattentive to society it loses our power.



We are erotic. We tell ourselves we feel whole, most like ourselves when we are deeply caught in our power of feeling. Our emotion spills over: possibility is endless. We have made contact with our core. We are limitless. Our emotion spills over: we cannot be contained.

LESBIAN LORE

Diana, goddess of untrammeled sexual love was known as Dyktanna in Crete.



late winter

FEBRUARY EVE (February 2)

We celebrate the lengthening days, the growing light, the first signs of reawakening life. We sprout beans, reminding ourselves of the reliability of growth from germination. We watch for the groggy groundhog to emerge from hibernation, we hear of the birth of the first lambs of the season. We need the assurance that winter will end. Anticipation of spring is our refusal to succumb, to give up the self to death and dormancy. We, too, are reawakening. Changes are happening unseen, below the surface. We celebrate the uniqueness of each of us. We share how we have grown through our emotional and spiritual life, how we have found our own boundaries, how we have learned from gentleness and joy, how we feel ripe for rebirth.

We learn periodic renewal from the moon who is new each month, a long honored symbol of rebirth and new life. We observe our passings with public declaration. We initiate. We find new names for ourselves, names which reflect our being. We celebrate our newness. The flames of our candles are emblems of the sun's and the moon's rebirth and our own. We place them in the earth, grounding ourselves in her. We have begun to menstruate, commenced a journey, taken new responsibilities, started a new relationship, entered a new phase of life. We proclaim to the community that it is we who have begun this new thing, that we have undertaken this initiative. We look to ourselves for renewal.

IN THE BACKGROUND

Ancient February Eve or Candlemas celebrations were dedicated to Brigid, goddess of fire and inspiration. Her sacred fire was tended by the daughters of the flame and was only looked upon by women. This feast of lights celebrates the continual rebirth of the moon as well as the sun's emergence and the coming of spring. Candles represent the powers of the sun and moon and their protection against plague, famine, pestilence and earthquake. This day also became "Wives" Feast Day, honoring women's fertility and their connection to the food supply. Brazil's Festival of the Sea in honor of Iamanja was also held on this day. Throughout many cultures portends of spring have been announced by the brief emergence from hibernation of a groundhog or bear, the appearance of whose shadow fortells the remaining weeks.

SEEING IS BELIEVING

Envision a place of renewable energy where you keep images of yourself as strong, enduring, lovable and to which you may go for courage and resourcement.

I'LL DO IT MYSELF!

I stand on my own two feet!

I use my own discretion!

I take it upon myself!

I do it of my own accord!

I paddle my own canoe!

I stand on my rights!

I plot my own course!

I do it upon my own authority!

I have a will of my own!

I do what I choose!

I act as I think best!

I have my own way!

I move on my own initiaive!

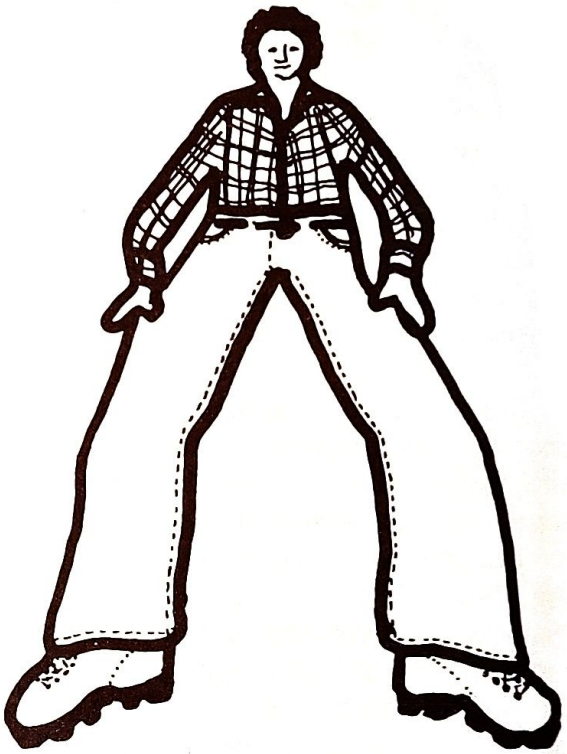
I do it at my pleasure,

at my own discretion,

as I wish,

according to my purpose,

freely.



IDENTITY

(Latin idem: same)

To have an identity, as in lesbian identity, means simply that there is a oneness to the personality, a sameness of a person at all times and in all circumstances. One who is always herself, who need not split into selves for her own or others' convenience, one whose identity is the same as her Self.

When we name ourselves, question what will be our way of life or our work, we wait for a vision. We actively seek this vision by isolating ourselves from the community and daily routine, and giving ourselves to imaginative activity. When our name comes to us, we will know what we should do.

OUR BLOOD

At menarche, the first menstruation, the Cuna wimmin paint red juice from the saptur fruit upon the face of the young wommon. The wimmin gather at the Inna shrine, where only wimmin may enter. The young wommon lies on the earth, the old wimmin throw sacred soil on her, blessing her life. They dance the dance of new wommonhood. The young wommon's hair is cut, her childhood falls from her. Omens are read from a newly cut saptur tree. She is provided with a secret Cuna name she tells no one else. Thus she becomes a wommon, among wimmin.

LESBIAN LORE

When we enter a new phase in life we cut our hair. Our hair is a soul symbol and the cutting initiates new growth.

LIMIT

There are limits we set for ourselves and limits we imagine others as circumscribing. The limits we set for ourselves form two kinds of boundaries.

The one consists of those options we know to be or to have been within the realm of our possibility which we at this time do not choose: I don't see becoming a cheerleader, taking acid, having a baby. Most of these are limits from experience we have defined out of our lives in defining ourselves. They are subject to extension and change.

The other consists of those options of which we have or have not yet conceived but which remain beyond our experience. Where the former are like fences behind our backs, these are hurdles in our view. Some when considered will become our choice not to pursue, but many of them remain limits to experience because we have not imagined them as possiblities.

LESBIAN LORE

Atagatis is remembered on the Mediterranean as goddess of the sea and prototype for mermaids and sirens, she herself being a woman with the tail of a fish. Among the Inuit of North America, Tannaleu, keeper of the seals, is a woman with the tail of a seal. The symbolization of woman and sea creature in a unity is an expression of our union of our deeper mysterious intuitive inward powers and our more outward powers of perception and sensation. That we continue to value and cultivate all levels of our selves makes us outsiders in any culture but our own.

CARING FOR OURSELVES

Hot baths or foot baths restore the natural acid (yin) balance to the body, and help to avert colds and flu, which are thought to begin in an alkaline condition.

Baths or saunas cleanse the outer body, and also serve to renew the inner being. Bathing is often used in initiation cermonies, symbolic of starting anew.

"i have an ancestral memory
of a place
where our hungers
are fearless
as water
on water

opening,
pouring oceans
into each other"

Jan Clausen, After Touch, Out and Out Books, 1975

When to find the moon:
The new moon rises at sunrise
The waxing moon rises 51 minutes later each day
The full moon rises at sundown
The waning moon rises 51 minutes later each evening
This cycle takes 29½ days.

LESBIAN LORE

Wimmin of Artemis are wimmin alone, undomesticated, untamed, close to animals. We are energy: wilderness, freedom of movement. We have no fear of places uninhabited by men. Our daughters are initiated in the wilderness when 9-12 through "bear service". They hunt and roam. They are virgins who swear never to surrender their autonomy.

AMAZON

A list of possible derivations for the word amazon reads like a catalog of amazon characteristics. Because they were known to sear the right lacteal gland in all eight year old girls as a denial of maleness and a statement of full humanity in one person, a (without) mastos (breast) is one speculation for amazon's derivation. It was further said to facilitate bow and arrow weaponry. Another possibility is amazoas which means "opposed to man".

Because they ate mare's milk, honey, raw meat and the marrow of reeds, but no grain or breads, a (without) maza (barley bread) has been suggested.

The Armenian translation of amazon is "moon woman" and among the Kalmuck, an Aemetzaine is a strong, healthy, heroic wommon.

As in all things it seems that the Amazons were self-defined and so probably self-named.

We are learning about the sacred ways. What we have learned is that the more sacred something is, the more secret; that is, the more it is likely to be seen by only those who attend to it. What is most sacred is enveloped in commonness, inseparable from the stuff of daily life. The great wonders are everywhere around us. We cannot stop watching.

OUR BLOOD

We celebrate the time of our blood. We paint red crescents on our foreheads. We run naked in the woods letting our flow streak our thighs, splash our feet. We prepare a special tea of raspberry leaves.

LESBIAN LORE

Gaea, Mother Earth, was born from the primal vagina, the "abyss sensing everything."

We sing as we work, healing, spinning, grinding corn, keeping the crows out of the garden.

We sing songs and raise great shouts at the full moon.

We sing special songs we create at turning points in our lives.

We sing to heal ourselves and others—the Navaho word for healer also means singer. Long tones and chants are especially soothing and restorative.

We sing, making room in our bodies for inner expansion, making space in the air for the entry of magic.

We sing, we open , connecting with others, with life energies. Our spirits blend.

O O O

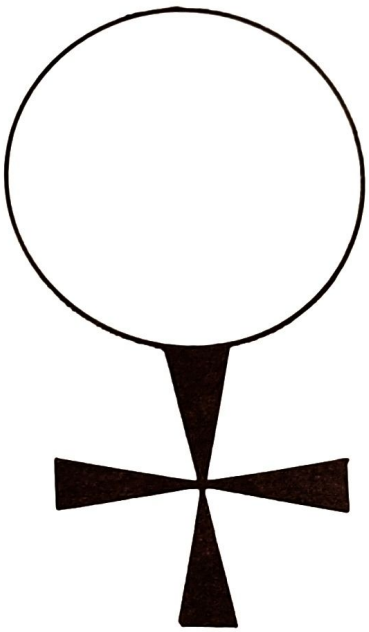
"We must envision the world we want, make it so real in our hearts that it already exists like the child growing towards birth, while we shape our songs of encouragement."

Elsa Gidlow, "Footprints in the Sands of Time", Sinister Wisdom 10

LESBIAN LORE

In China, nature is the maternal spiritual essence inherent in all that exists or occurs, represented by her gentle omnipotence. Her wisdom is Tao, the way.

Lesbian consciousness begins when I take myself seriously enough, value myself as a wommon-loving wommon enough to become the central figure in my life, to see that I matter, that my life is the reason for my existence and that my potential for wholeness is the closest thing to any goal or purpose I will have. All power I have is my own: it comes from my being, from my core. No other "power" because of skin or shape or rank is power; it cannot be used to make me more myself. All knowledge I have is what we as Lesbian wimmin know to be true, knowledge of which we are coming to have experience.



The symbol for wommon is derived from a pictograph of the Great Goddess: an equal armed cross with a full moon.

GEN-

(Greek: to come to be, originate, to be made, created)

We are of one generation—we have come from the same source; we share a birthplace, a generatrix. We are of the same genus—we are a clan; we are related by blood in the general sense that we are all of a kind. Our genius, our guiding influence given at birth, is our knowledge of who we are; our relatedness to one another is our gift. We are generous, that is, of noble birth; our gentleness toward one another exhibits our proud heritage. From our origins we generate the future we envision.

LESBIAN LORE

Ma Rainey had her own minstrel show on the black vaudeville circuit. Bessie Smith toured with her as a teenager. Both wrote and sang songs of independence and love for women.

"Every thought is an energy form and has the potential to be manifested on a physical plane. Whether you spend time becoming miserable or becoming strong, the effort is the same. Only the focus is different."

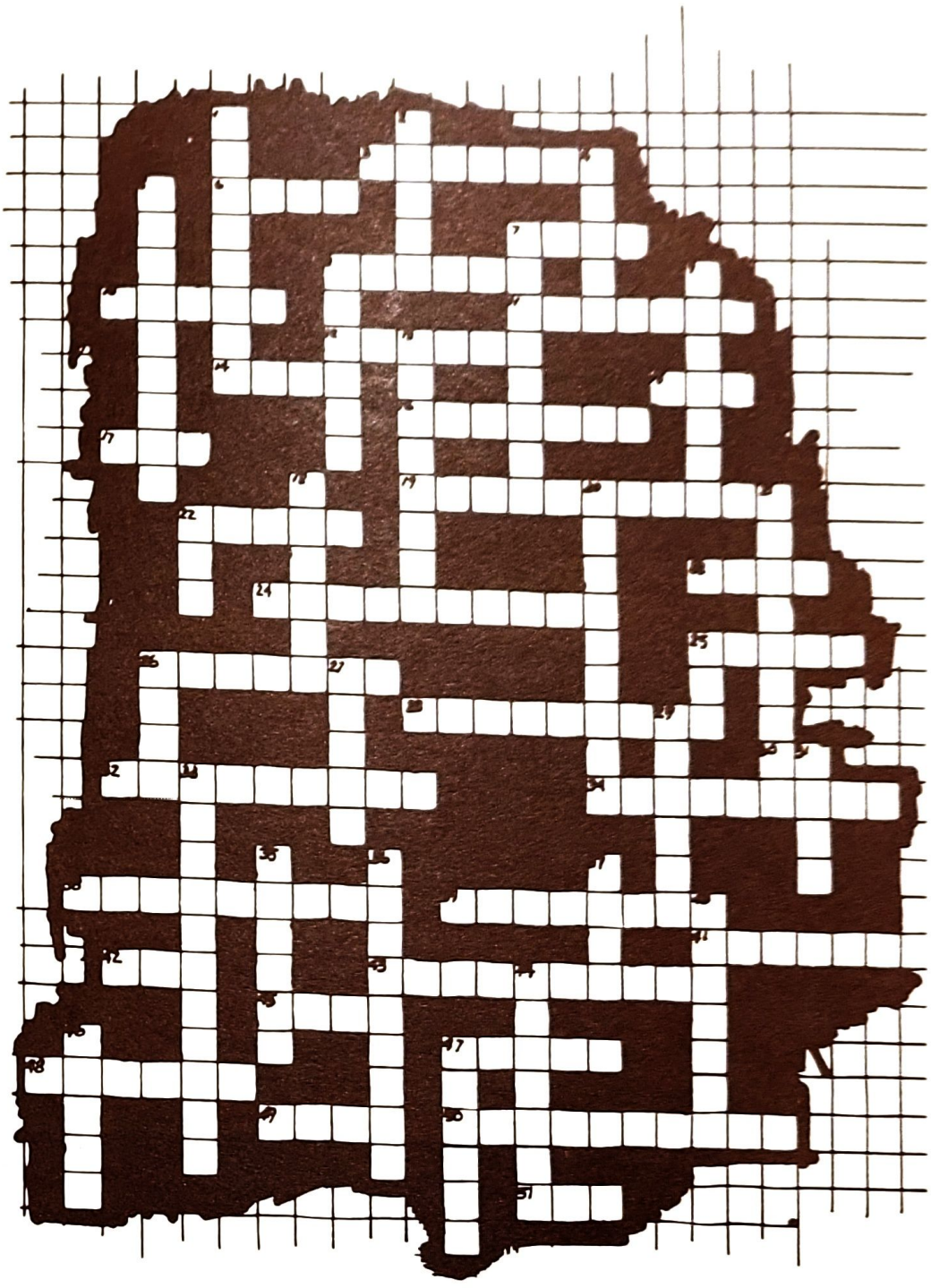
Diane Mariechild, Womancraft, 1976

ACROSS

3. disentangle
6. a lesbian
8. an amazon
10. extraordinary power; where knowledge begins
11. to nourish
12. activating influences, particles of vitality
14. female energy, specifically the genitals
15. old wommon of the woods
16. from our own roots
17. in the open air
19. centered in wimmin
22. country person
23. untamed
24. not having had enough
25. to confound, to divert the attention
28. inspirit, enhearten
30. womb's opening
31. outflow
33. one with whom bread is shared
37. safe place
38. breathing hole
40. our blood
41. to know
42. used to determine genuineness
44. heart or center
46. to interlace threads
47. womb, source, orgin
48. knowing
49. mother city
50. wommon (Chinese)

DOWN

1. daring spirit
2. enclosed
4. pertaining to the moon
5. thoroughly bold
7. to breathe together, to combine for a purpose
8. a mental image
9. one who experiences images passing through the mind
13. claiming one's self-importance
18. raving wommon
20. not having the same center; unconventional
21. playing together
22. animal symbolizing wimmin's genitals (myth)
26. essential qualities of a wommon
27. lips
29. dance, frolic
30. music of the voice
32. a bewitching
34. moonstruck
35. seen with the eyes shut
36. sense of touch; intuitive perception
39. Lydian literary language spoken only between wimmin
43. being whole
45. our source; where we live
46. female (old English)



Completed crossword in back of book

LOVE DAYS (mid February)

On our love days we settle differences with those with whom we have not been in harmony. We accept our differences as real but of less consequence than the commonalities that hold us together. We open ourselves to understanding by expressing our care for one another and the value we hold for each person's unique strengths.

We strengthen our friendships. We have special time to spend with wimmin with whom we share close ties but seldom see. We exchange gifts from our own hands, gifts of warmth. These we carry with us. Zande wimmin (Africa) perform the bagburn ceremony to cement their friendship. Taking a red maize cob, each holds half as they break it in two. Each then plants the seeds from her half in her garden.

"Where two or more are gathered, that is home."

Sally Gearhart, The Wanderground, Persephone, 1978

Each lesbian's community involvement is an expression of her self. What she gives and what she receives are consonant with her nature, thus she grows. She is supported in her relationship with herself, that being essential to the growth of the community. She is encouraged to go her own way, to discover her own truths. At the same time she feels her commonality with other lesbians–she feels "at home". She is gently enfolded in wommon-loving, so she is always aware of her value. She moves, she chooses, she changes, but she stands on the solid ground of her community.

LESBIAN LORE

Among people of Dahomey, the concept of soul–Sekpoli, as a part of the great mother within every person, makes aggression wrong.

OUR BLOOD

When we live naturally with the cycle of moonlight, sleep in the dark at new moon and in the increasing ultraviolet light of the waxing moon to full, and then the waning light, our menstrual cycles become regulated by the moon. We all menstruate together at the new moon as did wimmin long ago.

CARING FOR OURSELVES

Nature creates with abandonment. Everywhere there is abundance. Each of us must feel that abundance in herself. There is always enough. When we quantify and count, we form an expectation of insufficiency, of shortage. There is no scarcity of what we desire.

If you are feeling like there is a shortage of something in your life, call up as many people as you can reach to come share that with you—a loaf of bread can feed hundreds; a shared touch generates more of the same. If you feel "pressed for time", plant a terrarium in a bottle, talk casually to an old wommon sitting on her porch, or begin a beaded belt. Create abundance for yourself.

STRENGTH

She and I, we're coming to a new understanding of strength.

It's one thing to realize that strength is not finite: one's growth in strength is not the diminution of another's. It's another to know that you can grow in strength and not use the coercive privilege of that strength. It's yet another thing for wimmin who are growing in nurturance and strength to realize that it's an inappropriate use of strength to care for another with all your strength, to take care of another.

If I am strong, and can carry the load, I should do so for myself. If I need help I should ask for help in carrying not someone to carry it for me. If I offer help, I will carry only that in excess of which she can carry herself, or if in a joint endeavor, share the load.

By assuming I do not have to shoulder the whole load, I discard the "power over" situation and the issue of disallowing all of another's strength because she lacks part of the needed strength. It is self-nurturing to respond to solicited or perceived requests for help in such a way that I do not see myself solely responsible for the deficit or replacement of her efforts by mine.

As self-nurturers we are centered enough to sense another's needs, but because we know how to nurture we tend to nurture even when there is no reciprocity. We are slowly coming to the realization that there is no obligation to nurture. To nurture is a choice, a gift to give to those who will use our strength to become strong and self-nurturing and nurturant in return to the extent they choose and in such a way that it does not deny another's strength by affirming the deficit of that strength.

Our finest sexual experiences bring us to ecstacy—standing outside ourselves—the generation of spiritual energy from physical. In this valued state we see more than the particulars; we are made great with feeling. Harmony is self-evident.

OUR TONGUE

It is said that good magic reveals; bad magic seeks to mystify. It is the same with language: when words are used to conceal power, origin, impact, relationship, or the full truth, we are divorced from our deepest knowing, learning by rote to repeat what we can never "know".

Our language is organic. We have words for what we experience. We examine experience for which we have no words by saying it is "like" this or that or it is "this" and "this", a combination of concepts. In this way we enlarge our experience and our vocabularly.

We have no words for anything that is not consonant with our self-made culture. We literally cannot conceive of being any way but what is naturally our full wommon selves. We have only the one word "erght" to mean everything outside our ways, that which is unnatural or despicable.

Our language has great power of movement: we are moving as we create it; therefore, we can be moved by it. We can move toward one another and all beings with our words because ours is a language of relationship. By a word we can move great stones into position or gather a great number of wimmin for a purpose. By a word we can bring in the ocean when we are making love. We are learning the power of language. With it we are creating our reality.

OUR BLOOD

Menstrual blood, especially the first flow of a young wommon, is used as a potent healing source in extreme illness. Fear of such blood is not unfounded. Taboos around menstruation exist to deny and/or control this power. Some taboos specifically attempt to separate the menstruating wommon from the moon, to separate these powerful allies. We are powerful in our blood.

WIMMIN'S WORK

"My work is to inhabit the silences with which I have lived and fill them with myself until they have the sounds of brightest day and the loudest thunder." Audre Lorde, "Breast Cancer", Sinister Wisdom 10, 1979

LESBIAN LORE

Wimmin have a sacred imp, Baubo, whose silliness is holy. This trickster tells us jokes and piggy stories, giving birth to laughter, belly laughter. She is the origin of the bearded lady, also symbolizing the pubic hair of wimmin. She usually is seen riding a pig with her legs widespread–she is known for her extravagant natural sexuality.

We spread cream cheese on fresh bagels topped with sliced avocado and crawl into one another's arms for breakfast.

A dyke is one who is strong
one who is knowing
one who wants, who is insatiable
one who sees, who hears, who cries out
one who claims her intensity
one who is arrogant in defying boundaries and limitations
one who is friend to herself

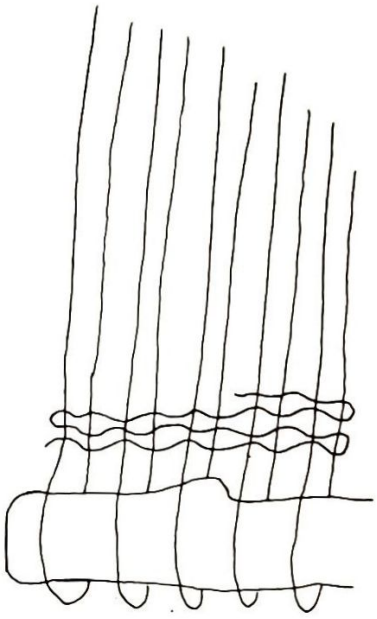
The sexuality of the virgin is an expression of the life force in a woman. She has chosen to be her own; in sexual heat she gives herself to feeling rather than to another. She relishes the affirmation that she is capable of so much pleasure. She makes love to herself; she makes love with another. She surrenders control to passion–her own.

LESBIAN LORE

Christine de Pisan, in fourteenth century France, wrote La Cité de Dames, a fantasy of the greatest wimmin of all times gathering in one city.

WIMMIN'S WORK

We speak fondly of our work. We weave as women always have done, a secret art. Our word "work" comes from the word for weaving, wircan. It is what it pleases us to do.



Each wommon is taught how to weave by another wommon. Often several of us will weave on the same piece. We first hang one beam below another, suspending them from a tree limb or anything else suitable. Then we make the warp by throwing a ball of yarn we have spun, over the top beam and under the bottom beam repeatedly until we have many taut strings running parallel to one another from one beam to the other.

We choose our wools, our cottons, our linens, colored by our own hand with dyes found in nature. We weave these over and under the threads of the warp, in patterns we learn from each other and those we invent.

LESBIAN LORE

Shakti is female creative power which is pure, primal energy. In kundalini yoga this female force is the sleeping serpent coiled in the lowest center, the pelvic/ reproductive, which rises to the ajna chakra (forehead) as the third eye of wisdom, also represented as the serpent , UaZit. The beginnings of our knowing are in the coiled potential of our primal energy.

OBVIOUS

(Latin ob: from + via: way)
To obscure the way.
To hide
To deceive us into disbelieving what we know.

What is obvious?
What stands in the way of our seeing/ believing our own way?
Obviously, any statement that begins this way cannot be trusted, is meant to keep us from pursuing a contrary thought, is meant to discredit any such thought.

CLARIFYING (the week before vernal equinox)

We have a solemn week before spring equinox to examine our lives. We are assured of having survived the winter; we look forward to spring and the evidence of new growth. We need to remember our sorrows and pain in order to go on to become fully new and enlivened. If we pretend there is not pain, our souls, our feelings, will not be available to us. It is necessary to survival to let what is dead pass away.

We take time to admit to ourselves those burdens we carry for our actions and to accept ourselves nonetheless. In this we are able to grow, to implement new awareness or sensitivity. We take pleasure in our growth, the ability to abandon old patterns, to change. We are not guilty. We are becoming more ourselves, more able to dream, to create a reality of harmony with the earth and one another. We do not diminish any by becoming ourselves.

We observe these days in quiet and simplicity. We mourn what is passing away as we relinquish it, inter it in the ground to be reborn. When we break our fasts, our silence, our solemnity, we are free of this pain. It is past. We are proud of our regenerative powers of self.

ASCETIC WOMMON

You are a traveler, a homeless person, an essential wommon. If you rub oil on your body, it is not superfluous. If you drink wine, it is not to tame your sorrows. If you wear bright clothing, it announces only yourself.

You chant and fast in private. And weep alone or with others.

You do not look to be saved. You do not appease or ingratiate yourself to any diety. There is no sentimentality, no superstition, no superimposed order. And no conceit.

No excuses.

No title

No refinement.

No pleas for understanding.

You are essentially only yourself. Able to bond, free not to.
Yourself today. Never static or memoryless.

Ascetic.

early spring

We move cautiously from our burrows, our caves, our heavy clothing. At first our eyes contract with the light, then slowly open to receive it. We yawn. We stretch. We awaken from a sound sleep. We have dreamt well.

In our dreams we were subtle, knowing. Awakening our bodies are heavier than we remembered, languid. We unfold. We breathe in clear, sharp air. The day is new. We are rejuvenated. That which lies below the surface rises to meet the face of things. We are a balance of the dark and the light as the day balances the night. We have survived. We have risen from the cool dark of our germination.

We push through the walls of earth in triumph. We are here. We will live. We have not succumbed. We burst with hope. We expend our reserve of self in abandon. We reach out eagerly for news. There could never be too much sun, too much air, too much water, too much food. We take it all in; there is so much to see, to hear, to feel, to taste, to smell. Life rushes forth everywhere around us. We project ourselves into it.

We are pleased. Everything feels good, delightful. Our spirit is transformed to matter. Our intentions, our projects are earnestly begun. We lighten with the lightening days. There is much to do, but in its own day; we cannot hasten the season. We must warm with the sun. Our exuberance is barely held.

We delight in ourselves, our bodies, in our freshness. We are dewey, wet in the morning. We glisten in the sun. We run our hands down our arms, our thighs, our bellies. We touch our lips. We touch lips with one another; we part them with our tongue. We are wild with pleasure. We are full with life.

We pick a bed of the first spring flowers to lie in. We run our fingertips over the velvet blossoms. We watch for brilliant flashes of birds in mating plummage. We are light; we run down the hillside. We laugh and play. We are so vigorous.

The time is right. We prepare for the planting. We soak and sprout seeds in shallow beds. We spread the compost. We watch the moon for signs. We lay the seeds into the warm soil. We bring outside tender plants that have sprouted indoors. We give them over to the rise and fall of temperature, to the dark and the light, to the wind and rain and dryness, to the chance another creature will harvest before we can. But still we plant with hope. The earth we know is fertile.

VERNAL EQUINOX (date each year between March 20-23)

Equinox is a time of balance, the days and nights of equal length, the forces of light and dark equal in our lives. It is open-tide, when the buds are opening. We find our first pussy willows, we begin searching for wild greens for our salad. The earth is warming, and so are we. We celebrate the revival of the life force. We gather, we dance to drums with wild abandon. Our sensuality arouses the dormant earth, as we send her our recreative energy, stimulating her fertility. We may portray in our dance that time of dormancy behind us, our mourning for life, and the rebirth before us. We share our new beginnings, new projects to come, our hope for the future.

We commune with the moon, source of fertility and moisture. We celebrate the life of wimmin, our solidarity with one another. We recognize the necessity of our life to the life of the earth. We tune ourselves to the earth with song and chant.

Our fest and feast are full of the signs of spring around us—crocus in bloom, pussy willows, eggs, seeds, green sprouting plants. We employ traditional symbols of fertility and regeneration—the pig, the rabbit, the snake—in shaping our doughcakes. We feed one another.

IN THE BACKGROUND

Wimmin have long celebrated Persephone/Kore's spring return from the underworld to be reunited with Demeter, thus bringing life to the earth once more. Celebrants ate seeds of pomegranate, representing the underground and the life inherent in death; they sat on the ground to promote fertility for the sowing; they fed doughcakes to snakes, protectors of the seed and symbols of the underground; they drank a barley drink flavored with mint; they reenacted Kore's descent into sterility, Demeter's mourning, Kore's ascent to fertility, and the reunion of mother and daughter, the restoration of wimmin's connections. Pigs were used in many ways to represent the daughter and wommon's fertility. An almost identical celebration took place in Indonesia, for the goddess Dema. Countless other goddesses were honored with spring festivals: the Pyre Festival of Astarte, the First of Nisan for Aphrodite, the Megalesia or Hilarion of Kybele.

The spring festival of Isis was wimmin-only, wimmin who swore chastity (no relation to men) in order to participate in the rites. Later the "chaste" participants were called maenads—mad minions of the moon; they held ecstatic, orgiastic dances under the moon. These were wimmin's alternatives to the increasingly male-dominated festival of the day, remaining wimmin-only until 1500 years ago.

SPRING: A TIME FOR . . .

singing
making compost
mulching the garden
planting by the signs of the moon
envisioning
gathering wild greens
tree planting
discovering wild flowers
laughing
watching birds and baby animals
waterproofing your boots

The egg contains the essence of life, and has long been a symbol of fertility. (The rabbit, too, is a fertility symbol, thus the bunny and egg basket tradition in the spring.) The egg was a matriarchal symbol, carried by the wimmin of Anatolia on the helms of their ships, representing the moon, their mother and the source of their fertility.

LESBIAN LORE

Oestre, the goddess of fertility, is the source of our word "oestrus" for animal sexual heat and the festival easter which celebrates this generating power.

If the first thunder is from the east, the winter is over. (Zuni wisdom)

○ ○ ○

"Reverse cannot befall that fine prosperity whose sources are interior."

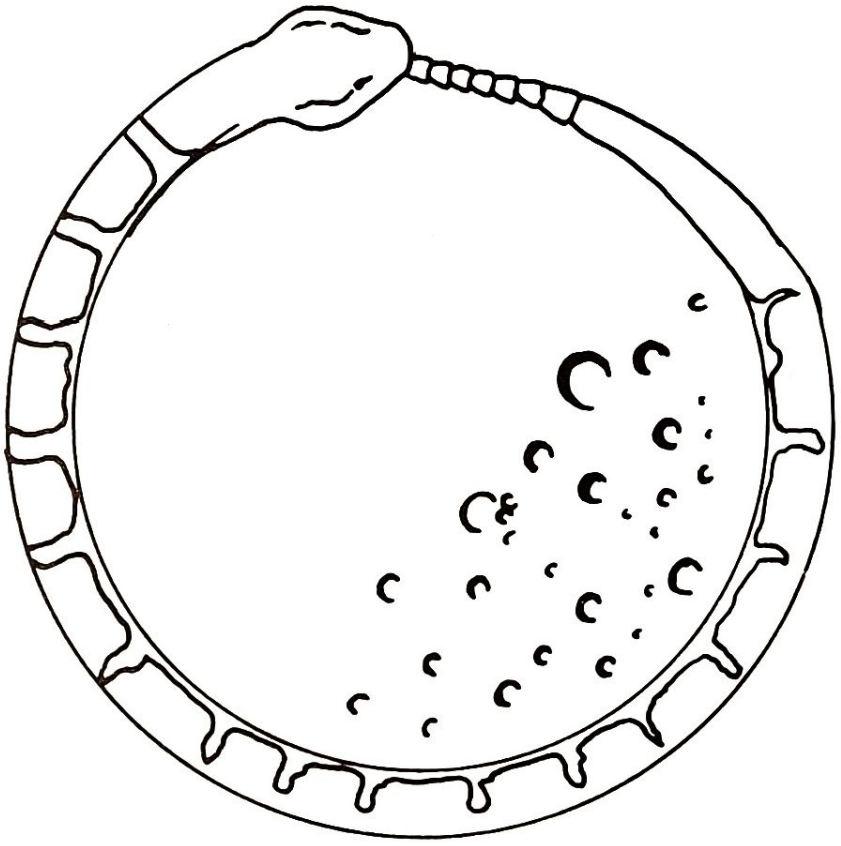
Emily Dickenson

SEEING IS BELIEVING
Envision going out into the world naked, baring insides and outsides without fear, opening in a soft place, feeling safe.

Spirituality never seeks to validate what is, but rather calls ordinary assumptions into question.

MYSTERY

Mystery is a word derived from the Greek mustarion, meaning to close the eyes or lips. Wimmin's mysteries are things seen with the eyes closed. The ancient sacred mysteries refered to those a wommon or goddess kept between her thighs, behind closed lips. A mystic is one who is initiated into the mysteries—one who knows.



We have the moon and snakes for symbols of our deepest mysteries. Snakes, like the moon, are sources of self-renewal, thus symbols of immortality, in the snakes shedding of its skin and the moon's movement through its phases.

Because snakes go underground, move in secret, and the moon in its dark phase is hidden, both are associated with the chthonic powers of our watery depths. Both snakes and the moon are entrances into the psychic realm, sources of counsel and prophecy, the beginnings of magic.

In passion, we let our feelings out, whether our passion is for a wommon, an idea, a cause. In passion, our fullness spills over, what is within us explodes. Our excitement set things in motion–we act passionately. We are strong as we experience the power of our feelings. At the same moment, we are vulnerable as we reveal our feelings to others, for passion is not something that can be hidden. In passion, we make an announcement–"This is me!" We are truly ourselves.

CARING FOR OURSELVES

When we're depressed things feel blocked, closed, tied up and it becomes necessary for us to "undo" things. Nor Hall (The Moon and the Virgin, Harper & Row, 1980) advises a wommon to: "unlock the doors, open the windows, uncork bottles, untie shoelaces, unbraid hair, set the cows out of their stall, free the chickens, free anything that is tied."

"Woman must not accept; she must challenge. She must not be awed by that which has been built up around her; she must reverence that woman in her which struggles for expression."

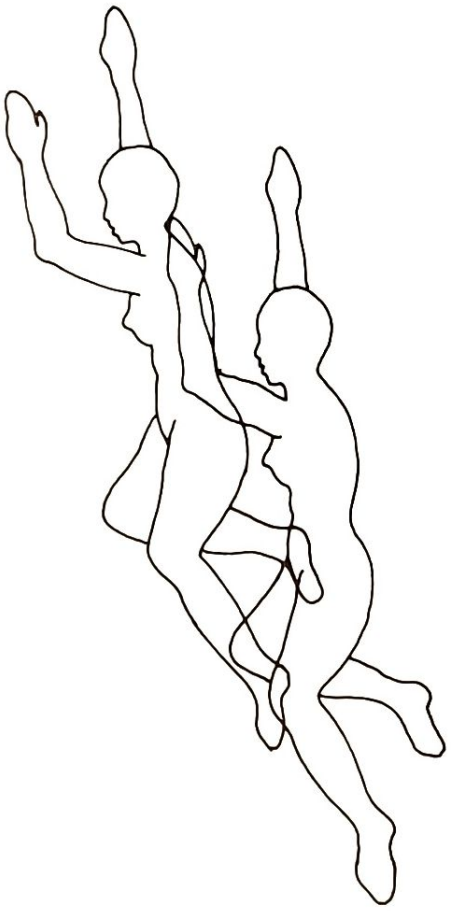
Margaret Sanger, 1920

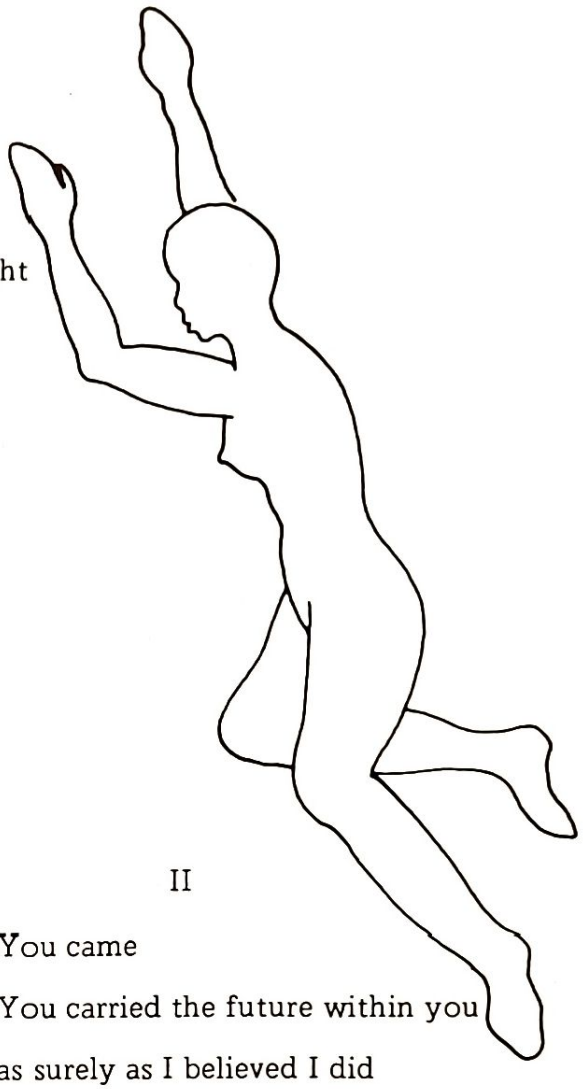
MADWIMMIN

Are we mad
when we demand full consciousness?
Are we mad
When we insist on seeing, naming for ourselves?
Are we mad
when we refuse to be controlled?
Are we mad
when we explode with the intensity of our feelings?
Are we mad
when we intend to survive?
Are we mad
when we choose our own knowledge?
Are we mad
when we create our own reality?

I

Like a fertile salmon
I swam upstream
thirty years against the current
my strength yawing with the weight
of my own belly
and the enormous pressure
outside
inside
without surcease
looking for the fresh water
of my birth
to birth the future
looking for the shallows
where there was peace.





II

You came
You carried the future within you
as surely as I believed I did
And you believed
We swam together
we rocked each other
and cried.

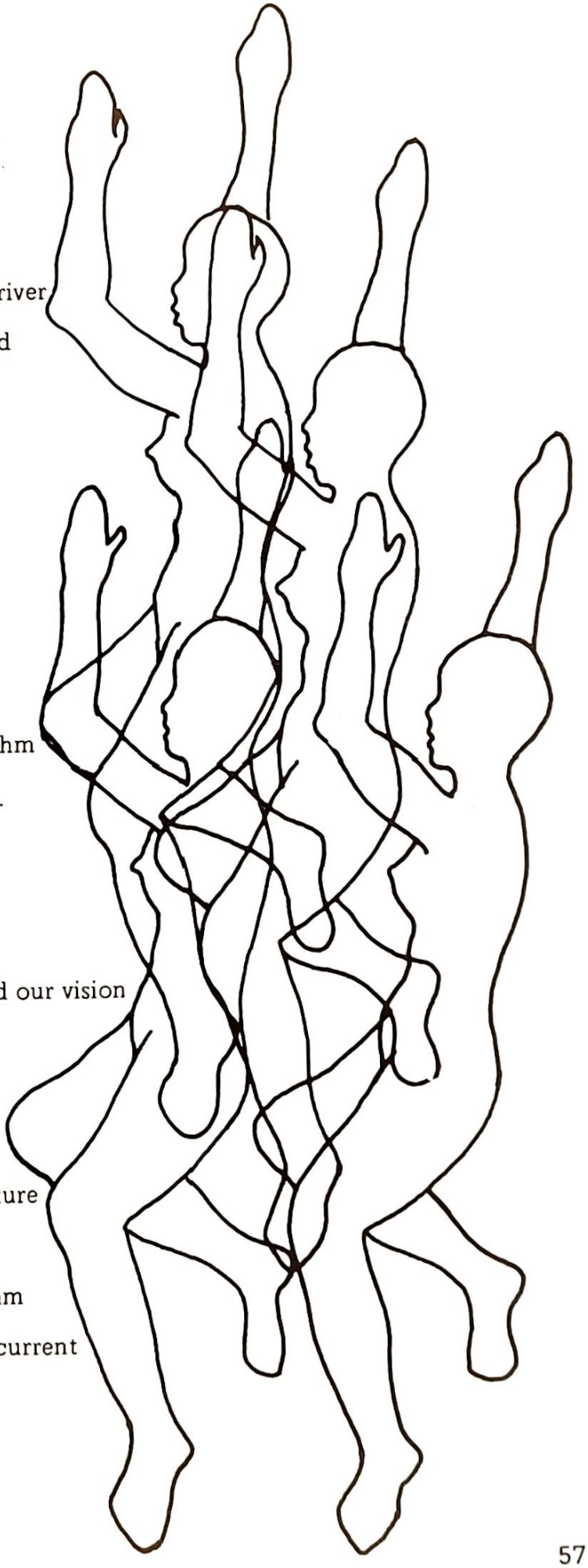
III

We made a river
We were not fish within a stream
We were dry
We were not nourished so we nourished
ourselves
and each other

We started a river
with our passion
it flowed from our legs
one river
from two mouths
the dry land drank our river
but it was not consumed
We flowed
not in the river
not as the river
but we flowed
to the river
and the river
flowed to us
to our rhythm
to our love.

IV

Our eyes are washed
Much water has cleansed our vision
We see
We carry the future
It becomes us to do so
We become our own future
We flow
We do not swim upstream
We do not float on the current
We made a river
As such
We flow.



LESBIAN LORE

Lilith, the first wommon created in Semitic creation myth, lived within a huluppu tree with a serpent around it. Her internal wisdon and self esteem eventually was cause for her dismissal from Eden. She lived in her own reality, calling to wimmin inside to meet her on the boundary and experience their own power.

We name/claim our power by becoming a subject to ourselves, by seeing ourselves as active principles in the world, as ones who can decide. We are self-disciplined, self-motivated and take responsibility for our lives. In becoming subjects, evoking our subjectivity, we can create our own reality. We have the ability to form our own meanings for experience. We are not dependent upon the mass culture for definition.

The more we understand/feel at home with our subjectivity, the less need we have to view anything "objectively", as mere objects of our environment with no connection to ourselves. Becoming more subject to ourselves we perceive without threat the subject within all others. Objects cannot relate/be related. As subjects we can touch being-to-being with other subjects. The more we are ourselves subjects, the more our world is also filled with subjects. We interact; we affect one another. We are not user and used. Our becoming subject opens up our world.

CARING FOR OURSELVES

We need to renew ourselves periodically by connecting with the earth. We seek out a cave, a spring, a grove where nature's energy is high. Those places which provide natural sanctuary to wildlife can be safe and restorative places for us, too.

BLESSING

(Old English bloedsen: bleeding from
Anglo-Saxon blod: blood)
A gift/curse. A consecretion with blood. A rite rendering something inviolable. Our blood/our blessing. Our monthly gift/curse. Our consecration. Our naming as wimmin. Our endowment with courage to be our own.

"My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you."

Audre Lorde, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action", Sinister Wisdom 6, 1977

OUR TONGUE

We always speak to one another only in our own language. This makes us invisible to those outside our culture who do not understand. By addressing one another only in our language we prevent the hurt and alienation that inevitably happens when borrowing words from other "languages" and "realities". Sometimes when we are speaking to one another, a wommon will realize she understands us perfectly even though she didn't know the language. She then begins to hear herself in our words, leaves everything and speaks her way into a new reality.

WIMMIN'S WORK

"Women's work is always toward wholeness."

May Sarton, Mrs. Stevens Hears the Mermaids Singing, Norton, 1965

LESBIAN LORE

Nidaba, the serpent or serpent-tailed, orginated writing. The temple records by her priestesses in Sumer are the first known writing dating more than 10,000 years ago.

The first scribe in literary history was a wommon. Her name was Geshtinanna and she lived 5,000 years ago in Sumer.

In Lydia, 2,500 years ago, wimmin spoke Emersal, a literary language spoken only between wimmin.

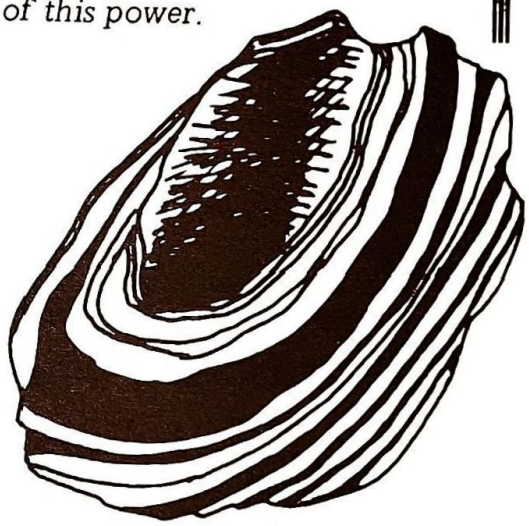
As recently as the Middle Ages reading and writing were done largely by wimmin. Although our heritage as writers and thinkers has been many times interrupted, we again claim our own language, generate our own meanings, thus shaping our experience.

LESBIAN LORE

Kybele, also known as Cybele, who gave her name to Cyprus and sibyls, was believed to have come to earth as a meteorite in Anatolia. This sacred black stone was transported to Rome to be placed in her temple there. On the way the ship carrying the stone was grounded in such a manner that the efforts of all the sailors were useless. One wommon, Claudia Quinta, freed the vessel and for the remainder of the journey, the ship was towed by wimmin in succession.

LESBIAN LORE

Obsidian, an igneous stone, is a symbol of the sacred volcanic fire of wimmin's sexuality. When carried in the pocket it acts as a token of this power.



We can't resist picking up an agate—its clarity and fluid order are present in even the tiniest chip. We collect them; they are said to promote grace, good health, happiness, intelligence, longevity. A person who looks upon an agate tells the truth and is aided in remembering. We are getting more honest every day.

We wear agates for fertile fields.

"What we do in token is to make the wish a fact before the macrocosm adopts it."

Z. Budapest, The Feminist Book of Lights and Shadows, Luna Publ, 1976

To make rain, fill large containers with water. Speak of the desire for rain as you pour the water out on the ground. In severe drought, even more precious liquids such as milk or blood may be necessary.

To receive something you desire, visualize the object and/or make a drawing or model of it. Realize the desire is already being fulfilled.

Any kind of environment you want you can have. Imagine it and begin to act on it as though it is accomplished.

LESBIAN LORE

At the age of eight an Amazon had her right breast seared off, scarring into an eight pointed star, the sign of Isis. Some say the right breast was dedicated to Isis, she of 400 breasts; others say it was because the left side or female side was so favored that the right was removed; still others claim the use of bow and arrow required the procedure. In any case these wimmin-loving wimmin were not mutilating their bodies or in any way showing disrespect for their female form. They were free to use their bodies in ways which they chose, living entirely within a wommon-centered culture.

WIMMIN'S WORK

We have young ones entrusted to us. We give them all the care and love we can muster. We show them how to care for and love themselves. It is necessary to this process that we not cease caring for and loving ourselves.

LESBIAN LORE

Victoria Woodhull, at the turn of this century, advocated that wimmin declare independence from the united states and set up their own government.

FULL MOON CELEBRATION

We celebrate the full moon thirteen times a year, from whence the number thirteen has become auspicious for us. We gather outdoors at midnight. It is the peak of our psychic powers.

Our celebrations are solemn, meditative. We are most in touch with our intuitive powers. We dance the spiral dance, whirling into being, whirling out again. Death and life, matter and spirit are one: the balance is struck ecologically.

We circle, facing one another, forming crescents by bending, then rising suddenly with a shout, sinking down. We contract and expand the circle. We contract and expand.

○ ○ ○

Planting by the moon (to utilize fully the moon's cycles of light and moisture):

Plant or transplant leafy and fruiting crops during the two weeks of the waxing moon.

Plant root crops the first week of the waning moon.

Do no planting the last week of the final quarter. Weed, prune, cut trees, hay or grain.

Some say avoid planting on the days of the full moon, new moon and quarter moons. This may be because seeds take in more moisture on these days and thus should already be in the ground.

○ ○ ○

Listening to the water is a sibylline art. Listen for what it tells us of the future:

It holds and reflects the light of the sun and the moon.
It falls, letting go, easing over, slipping around obstacles.
It softens, wearing the rock away.
It heals, dissolving what has been.
It is alive, sustaining its motion, its energy.
It changes and is changed.
It renews and is renewed.

OUR BLOOD

The moon menstruates when full, the day it is neither increasing nor decreasing, the day at rest. Therefore everyone observes the moon's menstruation and their own with rest. It is a day when no food is cooked, no work is done, no journeys are made. The rest observed became a Sabattu, and observation of the Sabattu evolved to all four phases of the moon, becoming weekly sabbat.

Our sexual energy and pleasure are necessary to balance the energy of the earth.

○ ○ ○

Snakes serve as counsel to wimmin because being deaf, they don't hear the contradictions around them; they act on what they know.

LESBIAN LORE

The origin of belly dancing was a sacred ritual mystery, an enactment of birth created by wimmin for wimmin as a celebration of fertility and the Earth Mother. Imprints in glacial sand prove the existence of this dance over 40,000 years ago.

The dance is intentionally erotic to awaken desire in wimmin. It was never performed in the company of any but the wimmin themselves. To lift the veil of Isis is to discover the secret of life. The dance may have been one of the Eleusian Mysteries.

The rotation of the hips, the controlled rolling of the stomach, the flowing strength of the arms and legs are an exercise for natural childbirth. It was performed around a laboring wommon to hypnotize her into relaxing with her birth contractions.

In our passage we meet up with clan members also in transit. We always recognize each other although we may not have met before. Our clans are constantly changing. Those with whom we share kinship are of our choosing yet we are not alike. We feel strength in our clans because we share visions.

"The possibilities that exist . . . among a group of people are a kind of alchemy. They are the most interesting things in life."

Adrienne Rich, Woman and Honor: Some Notes on Lying, Motheroot, 1977

WIMMIN'S WORK

"Spinsters whirl and twirl the threads of life on the axis of our own Be-ing. This Be-ing is itself the spindle, the thread the whirl."

Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology, Beacon, 1978

We heal and soothe ourselves in our spinning–we are truly home-spun. As we spin, we tell our stories, spin our yarns. As we spin, we sing.

"Once we begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from ourselves and from our lives' pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy of which we know ourselves to be capable."

Audre Lorde, Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power, Out and Out Books, 1978

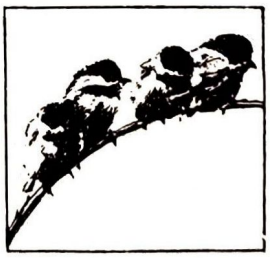
We "give in" to emotion knowing it is motion/movement coming from within us. Its source is ourself. We are not swept away as though controlled by something outside ourselves, something ominous or foreign, something that has no value for our being. No, the emotion is from within, urging movement from our center. Winds and floods and fire become symbols of emotion and the movement of energy. We understand. We trust the purity, the cleanness, the necessity of what moves through us from within.

A lesbian is one who chooses herself
one who is self-loving
self-appreciating
self-justifying
self-nurturing
self-controlling
self-determined
self-evident
self-governed
self-indulgent
self-pleasing
self-propelling
self-respecting
self-sufficient

Wimmin have more power naked.

WIMMIN'S WORK

Wimmin invented agriculture, and practiced it for eons before animals were killed for food.



We are in a close relationship with the earth, thus we sow seeds naked. This is also a way to be sure the time is right for sowing–if it's not too cold for us, it's fine for the seed! (Another sure way to test soil temperature is to sit bare-assed on the ground.)

○○○

When a wommon plants a seed, tends its growth, harvests its produce, prepares it for storage, grinds it into meal, then prepares it for food, can you imagine her wasting one mouthful?

late spring

MAY DAYS (first five days of May)

The night before our festivities begin is one in which we experience our closeness to spirit or the "supernatural". We gather around a bonfire of rowen and buckthorn branches. We are most witchlike and on the loose!

We burn a beltane–bright fire–each night on a hilltop, gathering around it to sing. We leap the fire to bring us luck. We partake of delectable food and drink. As always, we scatter the ashes on our gardens to feed and protect them. During our five day festival, we carry torches around our fields and gardens to symbolize the light and fertility of the moon and thus promote growth. We perform a full moon festival (whenever it falls in May) in recognition of the effect of the moon on our water supply and the survival of the crop.

In our exuberance, we wear wreaths of flowers, we carry baskets of flowers to friends, we rub our bodies with flowers, aromatic plants and herbs. We dance with trees, we construct a maypole, symbolic of the tree of life, and dance around it. We weave together the strands of our lives as we dance.

These are days of delight. We perform acts of love and pleasure. We celebrate our sensuality, our sexuality. We celebrate each other, we touch, we press our bodies together. We honor the mound of venus, placing our mouths devoutly on the mounds of our lovers. We express our joy and gratitude for our lives and loves. We are flowering.

IN THE BACKGROUND

April 30 has been known as Walpurgis Night, a witch's night second only to Halloween, the date opposite it in the calendar year, the times when the world of the spirit is closest to the material.

May Day, Beltane, or May Eve has been dedicated to Brigid, the fairy queen, to Maia, the goddess of increase, to Flora, the flower goddess, to Aphrodite, goddess of love, to Vesta and her Virgins, to the Bona Dea/Damia, goddess of healing, to the Nordic goddess Rauni, and to Sappha, symbol of our love for each other.

We gather together at given times. We raise power through chanting and dancing and lovemaking and feasting. We each have the power we have raised together. We keep our power as we return home.

LESBIAN LORE

Coven means "to meet" and is an ensemble of 13 witches.

Knowledge begins in magic.

LESBIAN LORE

Sappha was a teacher of poetry, music and dancing. The basic sound in wimmin's music according to her was the wail. She originated the Mixolydian Mode, a scale based on the note which arouses passion. In the diatonic scale with which we are perhaps most familiar this note is sol.

CARING FOR OURSELVES

Touching, cuddling, feeling, nuzzling, tingling, brushing, whispering, kissing, nestling, breathing, tickling, snuggling, sighing, tasting, caressing, hugging, stroking, murmuring, licking, rubbing, moaning, savoring our bodies.

TACT

(Latin tactus form the verb tangere: to touch)

A sense of touch. Intuitive perception. Sensitivity. Being in touch.

LESBIAN LORE

The Golden Fleece are the hairs that cover the pubis.

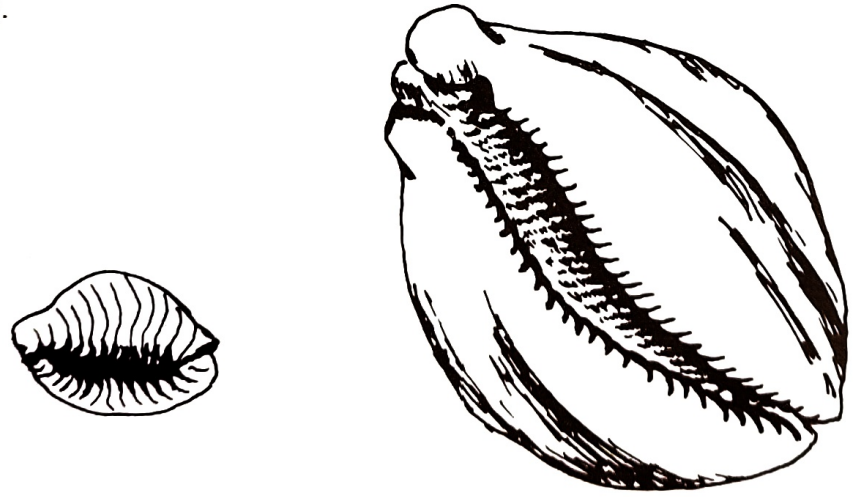
Our cunts are the seat of our knowing. We have only eager learners.

LESBIAN LORE

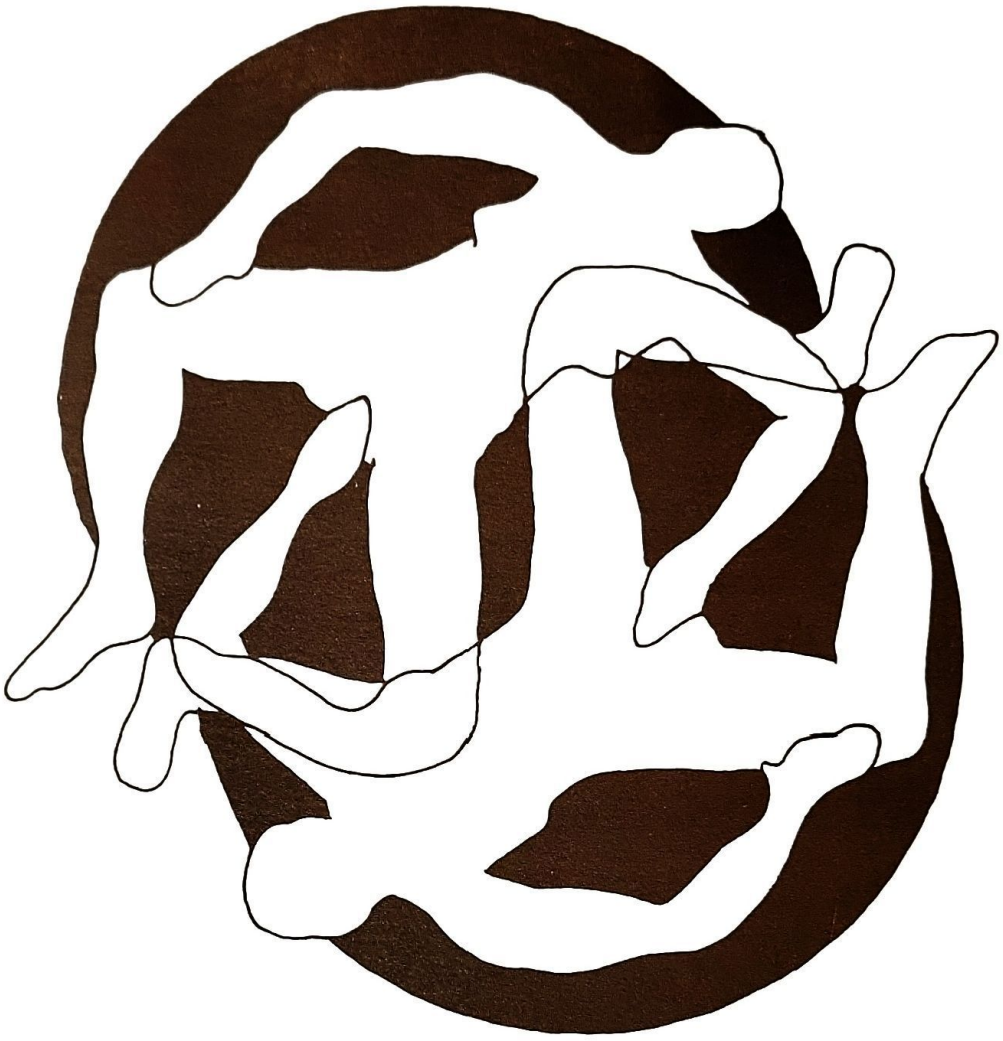
In Greece and Crete gifts were given to Artemis of silver labia and silver vulva, especially during rites of the new moon. Luna means both "moon" and "silver".

We are beings with a unique capacity for pleasure. Only wimmin have an organ—the clitoris—the only function of which is pleasure.

Kauri shells, a symbol of female sexuality, were commonly used as currency and in rituals, always in two's. They were called matriculus (small matrix) or porculus (vulva).



We are accused of soft living. They say we stare endlessly into one another's eyes. They say we play for hours with one another's toes, our own ears. They say our bodies have become loose, free-moving forms. They say at the slightest provocation we give in to passion. All of this is of course true.



LESBIAN LORE

"O bee, fair of wing . . . among all the flowers you have known, is there any more fragrant than my lady of the lovely hair and perfect mouth? Graceful as the peacock she dwells, rich with love for me." Avviyar, lesbian poet, first century bc Tamil.

Merlin Stone, Ancient Mirrors of Womanhood, Vol. 1 and 2, New Sibylline Books, 1979

LESBIAN LORE

A bath of dew is a love charm, dew being associated with fertility.

LESBIAN LORE

Isis of a thousand names and Nephthys were lesbian lovers well known to the Egyptians.

"I am a woman, and what is most wonderful about my desire is that I desire what I myself have to give. Women will always be with me."

Elana Dykewoman, They Will Know Me By My Teeth, Megaera Press, 1976

A virgin is one who remains true to herself
one who is one unto herself
one who gives herself to no one, but to her own feeling
one who is alone, who is all one
one who is unexploited
one who is fruitful
one who affirms the goodness of her sexuality
one who experiences complete sexual abandon
one who values the primacy of her own pleasure
one who gives herself to her own desire

Old wimmin grow wild. We don't wait for approval; we exploit the exception people make for us because we're "old ladies". We are out of control. We belong to ourselves—finally.

CARING FOR OURSELVES

A strong wommon is one who is friend to herself, who nurtures herself, who looks after herself with the recklessness of nature, who, like a cat, allows herself an egotistical enjoyment of life.

EARTH PROVISIONS

Foraging for our food has become a way of life. We are wild; we eat plants of the wild. It is said these plants are more durable than those that are cultured. They can give us more of what we need.

Dandelions (witch gowen) are among the most persistent. They provide unusually high amounts of vitamins A and C and iron. All parts are edible. The leaves make fine salad and can take other strong flavors for complements–garlic, olive oil, lemon juice. They may also be steamed over a campfire. Roots may be peeled and boiled until soft, then eaten with herbs of your choice. A beverage can be made by drying the root, chopping it and then roasting it over a bed of embers for a while. When the roasting is completed, add a spoonful to a cup of boiling water; let it "set" with a few drops of cold water after a couple of minutes. The petals, when gathered in the early afternoon, make a nutritious addition to breads. The seeds can be sprouted. Sleep will be induced by inhaling dandelion leaves with clover just before bedtime.

SEEING IS BELIEVING

Envision your capacity for growth and change as tangible as a seedling pushing up the earth. Witness yourself bursting with energy, pushing aside obstructions, converting sunshine and the elements into visible growth.

"Creating our own lives is only a beginning."

Susan Griffin, Rape, The Power of Consciousness, Harper & Row, 1979

LESBIAN LORE

A virgin goddess arose in Egypt long ago who was so much one unto herself that she was not only self-sustaining but also self-created. She is Neith. She expressed herself in weaving , being such a great weaver that she wove the world on her loom. Dykes who identify with her self-creating and sustenance keep her rites by weaving our own world from the strands of our being.

LESBIAN LORE

We are part of a long tradition of seeing beyond what is apparent. Prophets, sibyls, shamans are a part of our heritage. The Pythia were the priestesses at Delphi who possessed occult powers—they consulted the snakes, they breathed the air of the springs of Dirce (the great cleft in the earth), they sat at the Omphalos (the great womb), they were the renowned oracles at Delphi. The Roman sibyls, said to live on the face of the moon and to rove through dreams and visions, singing of the future, also wrote books of prophecy. Amalthea was one wommon who wrote nine sibylline books. In Nordic tradition, wise wimmin prophets were called volvas; in Japan the shamans are Noros. These wimmin lived comfortably in their spirits, and found a way of self-expression which removed them from wommon's ordinary role. As we experience greater wholeness, living in spirit and matter simultaneously, we too begin to see.

But no matter whether my probings made me happier or sadder, I kept on probing to know."

Zora Neale Hurston (1942), Dust Tracks on a Road, Lippincott, 1971.

LESBIAN LORE

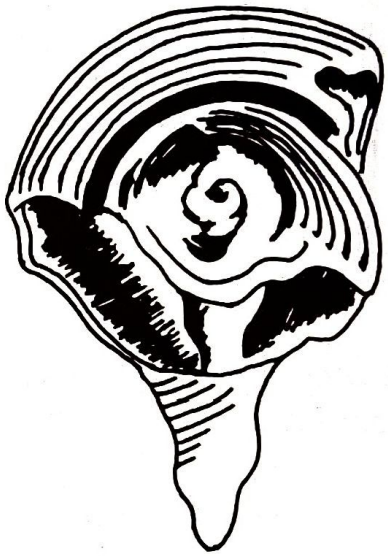
Yin, wommon in Chinese, is not passive but a particular kind of activity, that motivated by wisdom, patience, endurance, organic process.

CARING FOR OURSELVES

Breathing can alter your body. You can make yourself relaxed, anxious, fearful, angry, aroused, or unconscious by experimenting with different patterns. When you feel one of these emotions and want to change it, change your breathing.

"In beauty I will sing my companions."

Sappha



SPIRE

A coil. The windings of a serpent. A shell. To breathe gently.

SPIRACLE

An opening in the ground affording egress to subterranean fiery matter and vapors, a volcanic vent. A pore in the skin through which one breathes.

SPIRAL

A coil. A continuous loop unwinding. The shape of the serpent in our lowest chakra. The movement in circles that unfolds.

SPIRIT

Our animating principle. Our breath.

RESPIRE INSPIRE EXPIRE ASPIRE PERSPIRE TRANSPIRE CONSPIRE

Our animation our spirit our breath our unfolding our deep centers our seat of knowing our movement our breath our goals our plots our animation our spirit our breath

EARTH PROVISIONS

The burdock is a plant that escaped cultivation to become a hardy weed. In the first year it produces no flowers or burrs. This is the plant whose root you will find most edible when scraped, sliced and simmered until tender. Change the water once if you desire a milder taste. The root of older plants may be used in soups with other strong vegetables. The young leaves and leaf stalks are edible raw or cooked.

AESTHETIC WOMMON

Nature is your home, wild among wild.

You do not approach phenomena by classification. You are not separate from, distinguishable. You have no dominion, superiority, cultivation.

Your adaptation is relative, mutual vulnerability.

You know as you are known.

Form is to you what is given, what is not imposed, what has harmony apart from any rationality. You are form shaped by form. You are yourself but not your own. Nor anyone else's.

You are not a territory between good and evil, sane and insane, human or inhumane. Dissolution of boundaries has invited your madness, your wildness, your creation.

Aesthetic.

LESBIAN LORE

Ala gives life and receives life back into her sacred womb known as the pocket of Ala.

EARTH PROVISIONS

Plantain has long been a food staple in the plains of the midwest. Young leaves are good eaten raw or steamed. A tea may be made of the leaves, or an excellent potherb. The roots are a well-known survival food as are the seeds which can be sprouted. Dried seeds can be collected, ground into a meal which is then mixed with water and dried in the sun to form cakes.

"I would like . . . to see us take hold of ourselves, look at ourselves and cease being afraid."

"You must do the thing you think you cannot do."

Eleanor Roosevelt

WIMMIN'S WORK

Our work is wommon-loving. Wimmin's self-love and love and trust of each other will be the basis of and the force for further transformations.

LESBIAN LORE

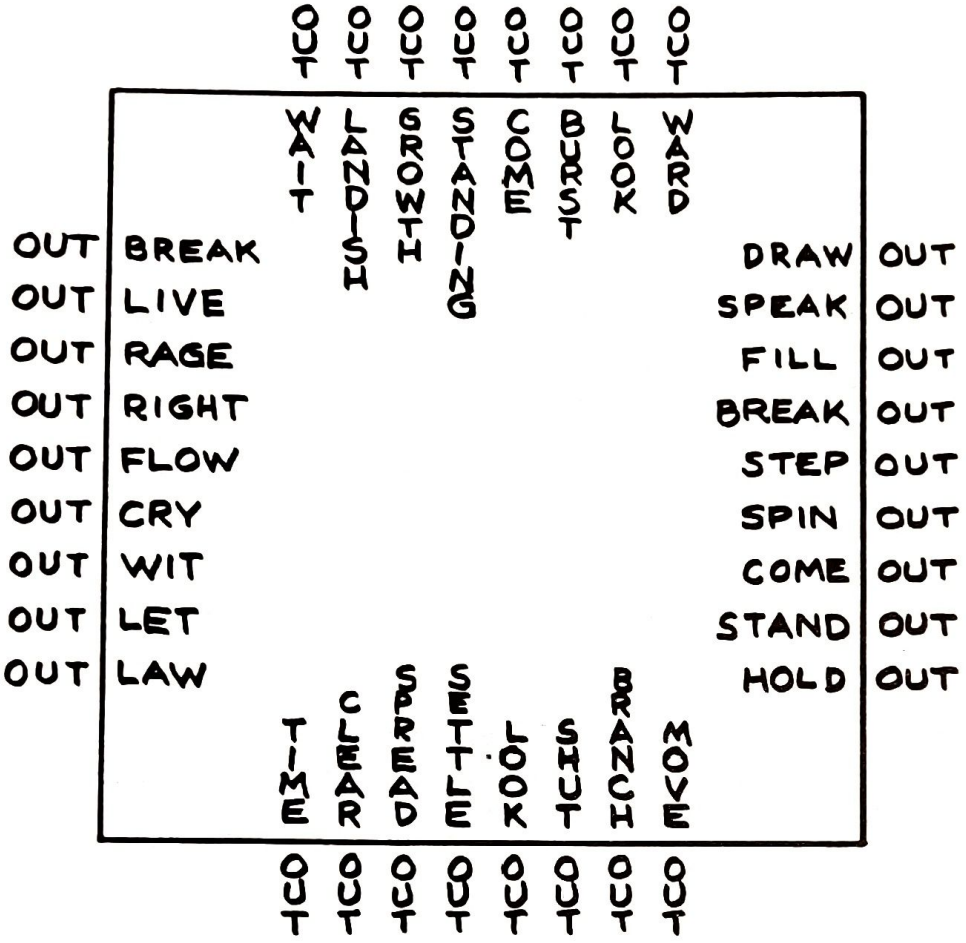
Amazon is a collective name for any or all of the all-wommon nations who lived between the Black and Caspian seas and the Causasus mountains. There were also many Amazon tribes in North Africa.

Ours is a nomadic clan. We move through the seasons with the earth, seeking nourishment and warmth. Each camp offers unique views; we see what we could not see any other time. We gather what is before us, break camp and follow the sun.

OUR TONGUE

We do not make dictionaries of our language. We draw a big circle. In its center we write the word for the wimmin we are. All other words spiral out. Everyone can understand each word, can see its relationship to every other word. We have many ways to say what we love best. All "definitions" are to words what glissando is to music–all is fluid, moving, sliding. We do not compartmentalize so as to be "this and not this". We are all variations within the circle.

WE'RE OUT OF BOUNDS!



"Whether or not we will 'be heard' is not the central question. What matters is that Hags ourselves hear, and hear our selves."

Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology, Beacon, 1978

Lesbian space

where we remember and trust our ways of knowing
where we talk about what can be
where we dream about what we want
where we create our own reality
where we believe in ourselves, our strength
where we believe there's more than what we see
where we believe in our dreams
where our desire is our strength, our power, the seed of our growth

"To garden is a solitary act."

Michelle Cliff, Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise, Persephone, 1980

A DYKE'S GARDEN

Rosemary: "Where rosemary grows, missis is master."
Lavender: If it thrives, daughters of the house will never marry . . . . it only grows in old maids' gardens.
Sage: It only flourishes where wommon wears the breeches. (It also ensures old age.)
Parsley: It is always planted by wimmin, as only the "wicked" can grow parsley.

EARTH PROVISIONS

The seeds and dried blossoms of clover can be used in bread. The dried flowers also make a fine tea in the proportion of a teaspoon to a cup of boiling water. The roots are edible as are the young leaves and flowers—raw or cooked.

○ ○ ○

Ants traveling in a line mean stormy weather. Wasps and hornets bite more before rain.

OUR BLOOD

The wimmin of the Mbuti tribe in Africa have discovered that the glance of a menstruating wommon can petrify, transform or make wild (uncooperative) anyone or anything.

LESBIAN LORE

Malabar of South West India is to this day matrilineal and matrifocal, with the worship of the Mothers their primary religion.

AEGIS

(Latin aegis from Greek aegos: goat/goatskin)

The shield or breast plate of Pallas Athena which was covered with metal scales, featured the head of Medusa, the Gorgon and was fringed with serpents. Now it means an influence which protects.

early summer

Green carpets the earth. Who would have thought there could be so many colors of green? Who would have guessed the profusion of shapes it comes in? Every day there is a plant we swear was not there yesterday, sprung up fully overnight.

The grasses are getting tall; dew clings to them half the morning. We rise early. We stay up late. We cannot miss the miracle of so much light. The sun has claimed these days. Though it seems she lingers in the sky longer each day, she is not at rest. Her energy is passionately transforming to matter: a million million leaves, armloads and armloads of flowers, oodles of buds, heaps of furry catkins, hoards of nests and animal young.

We watch an oak leaf unfurl. At a size barely visible it has all the markings of the great leaf it will become. The exuberance of the season lies within the vastness of miniatures stretching-pushing-consuming themselves into fullness. We feel the pressure of growth. The structure of the world seems to change; the contours of trees, of scrawny shrubs, of rock strewn hills merge into a lushness of vegetative growth. The barren ground we walked all winter is submerged. Who would believe it exists beneath all this green?

We become the summer. We feed from the sun; our energy seems without limit as though rushing from an unknown source, vacant, a potential held long in wait. We shed our clothes. We drop off our burdens. We let go. We ease into the day as though there is time enough for everything. We breathe deeply. We sweat freely. Our bones are warmed. Our hands take on the feel of the earth, veined with soil, stained with berry juice. Our mouths hang softly on our faces. There is no tension: all attention flows in one direction toward the production of plentitude. We have plenty; we have plenty in ourselves.

There is no sense of waste. All things grow in such sufficiency that purpose is attached to the growth itself, not to its use. Some grass will feed; some will fall back to the ground to mulch the next burst of grassness. There is no numbering the harvest. There is always measure beyond need. We stuff the fruits into our mouths with no thought of tomorrow: tomorrow we can pick again from this bounty.

The world is breaking with fullness. Too tight skins rend and the fruit oozes forth. We celebrate the beginning of the harvest. We pluck the corn from its cradle on the stalk; we grope for new potatoes in the mulch. We eat greens as though they will always be this copious. We lavish our tables; we gather barns of material for idler days. The store of goods is inexhaustible. There is abundance beyond request for all. There is no shortage, no need for rationing.

The liberality of the earth commands our fairness. We do not hoard. Each takes what she needs knowing there is plenty. No one's labors are exploited; no one's hunger is unmet. We do not speak of "rights": we all belong to the earth and she provides extravagantly for us all. We all have filled our sacks with good things. The sun is slowly receding, taking the greenery with her.

SUMMER SOLSTICE (date varies each year between June 20-23)

The sun stands still, creating the longest day, the shortest night. The sun's rays are at the most direct angle to the earth, resulting in increased heat and stimulating increased growth. The solstice marks the sun's passing–we celebrate to ensure the well-being of the sun and to send our energy to the earth. We light our bonfire with a concave mirror reflecting the heat of the sun. Our fire represents the energy in wommon's passion and the energy of the sun.

Throughout the day we cut nettles and thistles–thistles are said to grow two for every one if cut before solstice. These plants we compost, feeding the nutrients to our gardens. Nettles are especially good in the compost pile, hastening decomposition. We gather fern seed, which is nearly invisible, and will ensure our invisibility, should we need it. We gather fennel, rue, thyme, chervil, chamomile, geranium and pennyroyal, all to be added to the midsummer night bonfire for smoke and scent. We decorate ourselves with summer's flowers. We feast on cakes of mola meal, vulva-shaped and baked over our fire. We drink tea of mint and violet leaves with clover blossoms, or other ingredients we find growing nearby.

As the night advances we dance and sing renewing energy in ourselves and the earth. We look for clues and prophesies in the burning fire. We float burning logs downstream, carrying our troubles, cleansing us of sadness. We save the ashes of our fire, strewing them in our gardens to ensure a good harvest.

IN THE BACKGROUND

Midsummer or solstice festivals traditionally were held in honor of the fire queen of love, who may be called Heartha, Rhea, Vesta, Artemis, Callisto. It was the time of the ritual sacrifice of the king, and so has come to symbolize the goddesses' power over men. This was the holiest of the Celtic holy days dedicated to Danu; celebrants carried torches of straw in procession up a mountain, blessing new cattle, seeds, and praying for abundance. The Brazilian queen of the sea, Iamanja, at this time received flower covered boats of prayer and burning logs carrying the wrongs of her followers.

SUMMER: A TIME FOR ...

rock collecting
digging clay
making pottery
shells
gathering herbs for teas and medicinals
envisioning
gardening
garden songs
eating, sleeping out of doors
canoeing
laughing
moving to our summer tipi
berry picking
singing
hiking
gathering plants for dyes
gathering grasses for basket weaving
making hay

"Songs are thoughts, sung out with the breath when people are moved by great forces and ordinary speech no longer suffices . . . then it will happen that the words we need will come of themselves. When the words we want to use shoot up of themselves . . . we get a new song." (Eskimo wisdom, 1920)

Sherry Mestel, ed., Earth Rites vol. 2 Rituals, Earth Rites Press, 1978

There is a tribe that sets itself dancing and chanting for a month if something goes wrong with their world.

SEEING IS BELIEVING
Envision a life lived totally outside, one with the earth, experiencing all she has to offer.

Marigolds represent the sun, and were sacred to the goddess of agriculture in Mexico. They have been shown to be a truly protective addition to gardens, their aroma being good for other plants, discouraging white fly, and their root excretions preventing nematodes in the soil.

LESBIAN LORE

Fairies is an old name for worshippers of the goddess, especially those who were believed to be magical because they practiced sacred homosexual customs.

AMUSE

(Italian amusare; a: intensive + muser: to stare stupidly)

To cause to muse or stare, to confound, distract, bewilder, puzzle

To engage, arrest or occupy the attention of

To divert the attention of anyone from the facts at issue, to beguile, delude, cheat, deceive

To divert the attention of one's enemies from one's real designs

To draw on from time to time, to keep in expectation, to entertain with expectations not to be fulfilled, to divert in order to gain or waste time

Wimmin are amused by being kept from our insights, vision and revision.

"The new space has a kind of invisibility to those who have not entered it."

Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father, Beacon, 1973

LESBIAN LORE

Hulda taught the Germanic people to grow, spin and weave flax. The blue flowers of the flax plant reflect the eyes of Hulda's compatriot, Bertha.

ROSE
EROS

The rose is a vulva symbol, a sign of love, our mystic center, and our wombs. The rose is used to represent spiritual unfolding and attainment.

An ancient symbol of secrecy, the Latin term sub rosa–under the rose–means "in secret".

For the Rose, ho the Rose! is the eye of the flowers,
Is the blush of the meadows that feel themselves fair,
Is the lightening of beauty that strikes thro' the bowers,
On pale lovers who sit in the glow unaware.

Ho, the Rose breathes of love! Ho, the Rose lifts the cup
to the red lips of Cypris invoked for a guest!
Ho! the Rose, having curled its sweet leaves for the world,
Takes delight in the motion its petals keep up
As they laugh to the wind, as it laughs from the west!

Sappha
translated by Elizabeth Barrett Browning

ON THE SUNNY SIDE

We let in happiness, delight, glee, cheer, felicity, sunshine, joy, bliss, rapture, ecstacy.

We enjoy ourselves, we hug ourselves, we bask in the sunshine. We are in clover. We breathe freely. We grin broadly.

We treat ourselves to things to delight in, rejoice in, indulge in, luxuriate in, revel in, riot in, bask in, wallow in.

We find we're pleased, satisfied, happy, overjoyed, enraptured, elated, jubilant. Our eyes sparkle. Our hearts are full.

Our cheer is contagious, our world resounds with gaity, good humor, high spirits, optimism. All around us is merriment, mirth, joviality, hilarity, exhilaration.

We sing, we smile, we laugh, we cheer, we clap hands, we dance for joy. We skip, frolic, romp, gambol, caper. We are light-hearted, carefree, sparkling, playful, rollicking. We are zesty.

○ ○ ○

Living in community requires that none of us be self-sacrificing because the needs of the community are precisely to have each one be herself, offer her uniqueness in a self-loving way. In a community in which each wommon is fiercely herself, worthwhile and valuable in herself, to herself, for herself, the community is valued for itself, as a place of strong self-loving wimmin, strong in their differences as well as their common commitments. The community does not become a place in which the individual is lost; the diversity of persons promotes creative interchange. Self-loving wimmin form community to expand the possibilities for self-loving wimmin.

OUR BLOOD

Zuni Indians drank juniper tea as a remedy for menstrual discomfort. They also wore a heated stone under their belts or sat on heated sand to relieve cramps.

Moonstone, carried during menses, is an especially healing stone.

A kauri shell, worn on the belt, near the genitals, is a charm against menstrual pain.

WHAT IS STRONG ENOUGH TO HOLD STRONG WIMMIN TOGETHER?

Love
love for ourselves
love for each other
love of the way we have chosen

WHAT IS STRONG ENOUGH TO HOLD STRONG WIMMIN TOGETHER?

Gynergy
gynergy of the possibilities within us
gynergy of the differences between us
gynergy of the ways made possible by our connection

WHAT IS STRONG ENOUGH TO HOLD STRONG WIMMIN TOGETHER?

Work
work in which each may fully realize herself
work in which each responds as she is able
work to which each is fully committed

WHAT IS STRONG ENOUGH TO HOLD STRONG WIMMIN TOGETHER?

Vision
visions for our full consciousness, our wholeness
visions for a wommon-created reality
visions for the healing of the earth

ooo

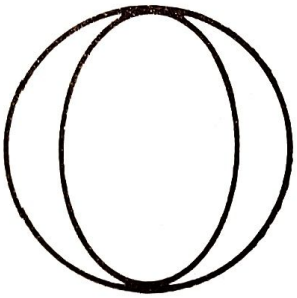
They say a journey is the distance one may travel in a day, journ from the word for day. We say we have not been home for many days, that we do not expect to be home by nightfall tonight, that it may take many more days to go where we are headed. Yet we are on a journey. We have light packs. We are traveling today, for today, as far as we may go in this day. This is a journey. Tomorrow we will travel as far as we can go that day. Our destinations are vague; they are only for the day and may change in the passage of the day. We can always travel for a day. We are always ready to move on in the early morning. We are journeying.

EARTH PROVISIONS

These plants are suitable for consumption in the wild:

dock (root, leaves–raw or cooked)
wild cucumber (fruit–sparingly, young shoots, leaves–raw)
sow thistle (young leaves raw, older–cooked)
lamb's quarters (seeds, greens–raw or cooked)
chickweed (raw)
day lily (buds and roots)
ox-eye daisy (leaves, petals)
wild carrot (root)
wild rose (petals, leaves, hips)
chicory (root)
couch grass (rhizome on root)
dead nettles, stinging nettles (young shoots–cooked)
fiddlehead ferns (young, uncoiled fronds–cooked, root–roasted)
mullein (flowers)
amaranth (leaves, seeds–roasted for breads, porridge)
purslane (young leaves–raw, leaves–cooked in stews, soups)
wood sorrel (leaves)
comfrey (leaves, roots–roasted)
milkweed (buds, leaves, young stalks–cooked)
shepherd's purse (young leaves)
cattails (whole thing–raw or cooked)
mallow (greens–raw or cooked)
wild lettuce (leaves)
winter cress (leaves)
jerusalem artichoke (root–cooked)
burnet (greens–raw)
willow (young shoots–insides raw, leaves)
dill (leaves, stems, flower, seeds)
mint, peppermint (raw or as tea)
sunflowers (seeds, roots)
silverweed (roots–cooked)
fireweed (young stems–cooked)
watercress (leaves)
prickly pear (pear–red fruit)
borage (leaves, blossoms–cooked)
salsify or goat's beard (root–cooked)
mustard (leaves, buds)
miner's lettuce (leaves–raw or cooked)
artemesia(green leaves–raw or cooked)
salvia (seeds–"chia")
valerian (root–baked)
irish moss (shore)
glasswort, "beach asparagus"
dulse (sea)
laver (sea)
wild celery (shore)
lichens (artic)
iceland moss (artic)
rock cress (artic)
wild rice
millet
oats
buckwheat
rye
black walnut
hazel nut
hickory
butternut
beachnut
acorns
blackberries
mulberry
blueberry
hawthorn
wild grapes
wild raspberries
wild cheries
pin cherries
choke cherries
high bush cranberries
ground cherry
pawpaws
lingonberries
gooseberries
serviceberries
strawberries
currants
thimbleberries
wine berries

We watch the cycle of the moon: it is full, it slowly disappears; it slowly re-emerges and becomes full. Its shape is continously in transition. We feel its movement is like taking connected breaths. We say we are inspired by the moon. We remember inspiration is breathing in. We take in the rhythm of the moon. We feel germination in its darkness. We feel renewed in its reappearance. We are full when it is full, full of ourselves. We quiet down. We breathe out the old. Our breaths are connected. Our feelings are near the surface.



LESBIAN LORE

Crescents associated with the moon are always a sign of wommon's influence and reverence for wimmin, an indication of goddess worship. Often they are found together, two crescents forming a vulva, a sign of protection. This sign has been found among the earliest ruins.

The weather tends to change at the new and full moons, with the largest amount of rainfall occurring 3-5 days after the full moon.

LESBIAN LORE

Numbers and letters are not dichotomized within the cultures that invented rather than "borrowed" them. They often shared symbols, the first ten or so letters being the same as the numerals. Individual letters/ numerals could represent concepts or formulas, e.g. π. The symbolic levels on which a combination of glyphs worked was infinite.

OUR TONGUE

We have a word for ourselves. It is the first word we created in our new language. It is an absolute: it has no referent, prefix or suffix. We use it interchangeably for ourselves, "people", "strong wommon", "lesbian", "goddess", "nature". Every word in our language is either a combination of this word and other sounds or this same word said a thousand ways.

Silent with wonder, we listen to the croon and croodle of the birds. We commence humming and brooling with them. Small animals take up the chant. Our emotion is released in chantpleure: we sing and weep at the same time. Mournful dove joins warbler, there is cooing, singing, there is keak and cackle. We chuckle, we chortle with joy, the animals chirr and they squeak. We crow, we shriek, we all shake with laughter. The day has begun.

Old English words:
croodle: faint humming or low music of birds
brool: low, deep humming
keak: cackle
chantpleure: originally French, meaning to sing and weep

LESBIAN LORE

White, black and red in India are colors sacred to Devi because her eyes, guna strands of matter, are these colors. So intense are they that if she closed her eyes for an instant the entire universe would disappear. Many of us as young girls used to effect the same wonder.

Lightning that is red or yellow does not precede rain, but white lightning indicates a storm.

LESBIAN LORE

The three Kadiv sisters of the Inuit of the Baffin Islands cause thunder and lightning by rubbing their bodies together.

CARING FOR OURSELVES

Negative ions in the air are necessary for our well-being. This healing air is found after thunderstorms, in deserts, near mountains, at the sea, lakes and waterfalls. (Positive ions in abundance, as in city smog and certain "bad" winds, cause depression and health disturbances.)

LESBIAN LORE

Bulldyke comes for the name of a Celtic queen Boadicea or Boudica who led her people in a rebellion against Rome, burning London and capturing Roman cities in the process.

Among her people, same-sex love was the norm with groups of wimmin warriors called gwiddonot living together, making prophecies and fighting in battles. Their goddess was shown crouched over the temple doorways with rays chiseled in stone radiating from her clitoris. Bodacious and bodacity (bold and courag–eous) orginate from the brazen wommon.

"A revolution capable of healing our wounds. If we're the ones who can imagine it, if we're the ones who dream about it, if we're the ones who need it most, then no one else can do it."

Aurora Levins Morales, "And Even Fidel Can't Change That", in This Bridge Called My Back, Moraga and Anzaldua, eds., Persephone, 1981

MACHA

Macha is a very ancient wommon's word from the Celtic meaning "mighty".

LESBIAN LORE

Among the Amazons, two queens ruled together. They were often lovers, occasionally sisters, and shared authority in all matters.

We know the shape of power is the shape of reality. We find our power in our eroticism, our enjoyment of female sexuality. Our culture then becomes as generous as nature herself, as resourceful and expansive as wimmin, as open and creative as our wombs.

FANTASY

Fantasy, from the Greek phantasia, literally "making visible", is a method of enlarging what we see. Because it gives value to what we imaginatively see as much as what we figuratively see, it doubles our time and space. What we are in the process of making visible, seeing, influences us, is a realm within which to act. Actions within fantasy come from our source of power as we form/give life to them.

When we have a vision we take control of our own future. We have something to look at, move toward, a framework. Our vision changes as we move; more possibilities are evident as we begin to realize our vision.

○ ○ ○

We must act as if what we do makes a difference.

CARING FOR OURSELVES

Our spirituality springs from the fullness of our being. Self-denial and deprivation are not productive of wimmin's spirituality. We become enlightened and aware by the bounty, the lushness of life, of life experience. When we experience this fullness we are able to be gracious to ourselves and others.

We become aware of our feelings. We know our deepest sense of self comes from these feelings. We name them erotic. We claim that power within us that is female creative energy. We pleasure our erotic selves and feel renewed. We touch our deep core and become whole. We pass into another reality where this female creative energy is the context of all activity. We touch our erotic selves over and over again. It is such a pleasure.

LESBIAN LORE

Some of the North African Amazon tribes came into contact with the remnants of the matriarchal civilization of Atlantis who they respected. The wimmin of Atlantis were known for their philosophers and wisdom.

Plants have feelings, and can sense our emotions. It is said to be necessary to tell our plants and our garden flowers of any household disaster or important news, or they'll wither. (This is also true of bees—they're said to leave if not informed.)

○ ○ ○

Gnats in compact bodies at sunset mean fine weather tomorrow.

Locusts sing when it is to be hot and clear.

If it is going to rain, bees will not leave the hives or fly only short distances from them.

○ ○ ○

The power of a tree:
Every year a tree creates 99% of its living parts.
An elm may make as many as 6 million leaves each year.
A large tree lifts one ton of water every day in the summer.

We are on a journey. We sort our things and pack those that hold meaning, those that will be of use in the direction in which we move. Once we have made the decision to move on, there is no going back: the thought is intolerable to us. We uproot, but are not rootless; we are rooted in ourselves, solid, seeking solid ground.

"journeywoman
traveling roads
that disappear sometimes
between one step and the next
but which lead us all back home"

Martha Courtot, Tribe, Pearl-child, 1977

If the evening sky is gray and the dawn red at the horizon, there will be rain; if the sky is red at night and gray at morning, the day will be fair.

If the sun's corona is expanding, the weather is clearing; if it is shrinking, moisture is coming.

WIMMIN'S WORK

Hopi wimmin work together with clay; for them, making pottery can be a social occasion. Painting the pots is especially important, as each wommon's thoughts are recorded in the painting.

Zuni wimmin remain silent throughout the potting process, out of respect for the clay, a living being. Only wimmin are allowed near the clay beds; each wommon collects her clay alone. Before firing, a piece of bread is put into each pot, so the spirit of the pot is fed with the spirit of the bread.

LESBIAN LORE

Bast, of ancient Egypt, had a catlike head and a wommon's body. She was celebrated among those whose lives were filled with feline grace and pleasure. Purrrrrrr.

When we speak of "integrity" we are talking about our lives being all of one piece, being related, the right hand knowing what the left does. Integrity comes from integer—a whole, something irreducible.

On the other hand, people talk about integration, the combining of elements to make a whole. This is not the same thing. It is the difference between a blanket woven in one piece and a patch-work quilt.

Fragmentation has been used against us. Our lives do not become whole by tying together the parts. Our lives are whole if we own/value our whole being and refuse to be compartmentalized and ranked.

CURIOUS

(Latin cura: care)

One who is careful of learning. One who investigates. One who must know for herself, whose intellect is precise, probing. One who gratifies her senses and mind with experience.

Spiders working at their webs in the morning presages a fair day.

LESBIAN LORE

Lemnos, an island near Lesbos in the Mediterranean, is mentioned early as having an all-female population. Nearby Lydia was a cultural center in the Mediterranean for over 1000 years. It was matriarchal in government

late summer

FIRST FRUIT FESTIVAL (August 2)

We celebrate the beginning of the harvest, the success of our working in concert with the earth to produce grain, fruit, vegetables. We make bread with the first of our wheat; we shape cornbread figures symbolizing our first ears of corn harvested. Our labors in spring and early summer are rewarded. We concentrate on what our work in other areas has accomplished—what insights we have gained, what good fortune we have reaped. We look ahead to what we hope to harvest in the weeks to come, from our gardens and our lives. We carry torches to our gardens and groves to guard against damaging storms or influences in our lives.

IN THE BACKGROUND

Late summer was the time of the celebration of Habondia, goddess of plenty, and of the corn mothers, Chicomecoatl, Kore and Ceres. Traditionally called Lammas, the goddesses were offered a loaf of bread from the new grain, thus the possible origin of the name loaf-mass. In Roman times, a fest of candles and torches was held for Diana, in thanks for the harvest and in supplication that destructive storms might be averted. This also became a holiday for slaves and outlaws and a time for reform of social oppression.

"In the beginning . . . we knew the power of the sun, messages of the stars, and strength in cold water. We knew everything there is to know so we only had to live according to the cycle as it came . . . A dance, a song, a greeting, a smile was a thanksgiving for life . . . then we knew how to dance, sing, how to smile . . . We knew, so therefore we lived. . ."

Tsewaa in, I Am the Fire of Time Jane Katz ed Dutton 1977

OUR BLOOD

Our blood has strong powers to protect. If menstruating wimmin run naked around the perimeter of a field infested with caterpillars, the food crop will be saved. If we put our menstrual blood upon the lintels of the entrance to our home, all within will be safe.

SEEING IS BELIEVING

Envision yourself hovering over the verdant earth, able to see all the plants and animals without your presence changing any of it. Then settle yourself down in a still place until you are accepted as a natural part of the environment.

The Pueblo have underground ritual shrines called kiva which symbolize mother earth's womb. Entrance into the kiva is made through a central opening symbolic of the Place of Emergence. This is the sacred site of entering the fourth world.

LESBIAN LORE

The old wommon in the moon made our first fire by rubbing her vulva.

Her body hangs in soft folds. Her skin in creased with her experience. Her hair is white and unruly. Her hands pause a long time in touching yours. She is ripening.

"We will be coming back
all of us
claiming steps we never knew
singing songs we've long forgotten."

Beth-Luis-Nion, "Valley Below", WomanSpirit, 21, 1979

When trouble comes to me
I have to go and dance.
I dance until the dust receives my trouble.
The dust takes my trouble to the mountain.
The mountain grows with the dust of trouble.
The place for my trouble to be.

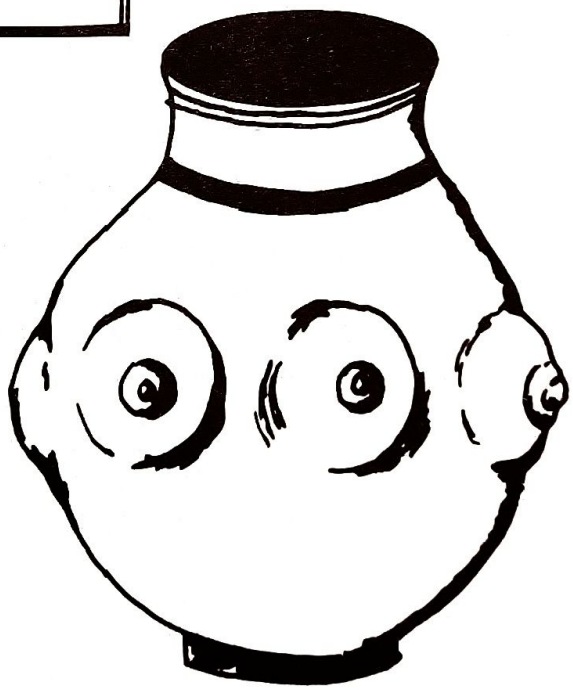
Pueblo Chant

"The women say, truly is this not magnificent? The vessels are upright, the vessels have acquired legs. The sacred vessels are on the move."

Monique Wittig Les Guerilleres
Avon, 1969

WIMMIN S WORK

Every object made by wimmin is imbued with our connections to nature.



Most of the earth is water, most of our bodies are water. Water is a balancer, sensitive to the slightest changes. Water is a power, moving earth, breaking rock. Water is cleansing, healing, to body and spirit–falling water is especially "good medicine".

The delicate balance of water on earth is controlled by the moon, and because of wimmin's close connections with the moon, wimmin have always had the water supply in their care. We have drawn and carried the water, fashioned the water jugs. We have been the rainmakers, dancing naked in the moonlight, pouring precious water on the parched earth from breasted vessels.

What we know as the mushroom is a brief flourish the fungus sends forth for the purpose of dispersing spores. The mushrooms are always on the perimeters of the new underground growth of the plant. As the mushroom grows, the "ring" of mushroom caps extends further out. If nothing blocks its growth it will be a perfect circle of mushroom caps. This is a fairy ring. They have been measured at more than 50 feet in diameter.

○○○

Listening to the trees is an art of old Indian wimmin. Listen for what they can tell us of living:
How they are strongly rooted, yet dance with the wind.
How they give and receive as simply as breathing.
How they provide for themselves, and for others as well.

○○○

Lunaria, or moonwort, is a magic plant, its seeds resembling the full moon. Locks are said to open when the plant is laid upon them. If eaten, it gives the sensation of flying.

○○○

Chickweed closes up with any drop in air pressure.

○○○

How we make time for ourselves:
We saunter, we stroll, we amble
we linger, we loiter, we dawdle
we mosey, we shuffle, we poke along
we creep, we crawl, we meander
we get no place fast.

We practice a leisurely drawl, a languor
we sprawl, we loll, we slacken
we slow down, let up, ease off
we set off at a snail's pace
we take it step-by-step, bit-by-bit, little-by-little
we are slow pokes, we dilly-dally
we are at ease
we take our own sweet time.

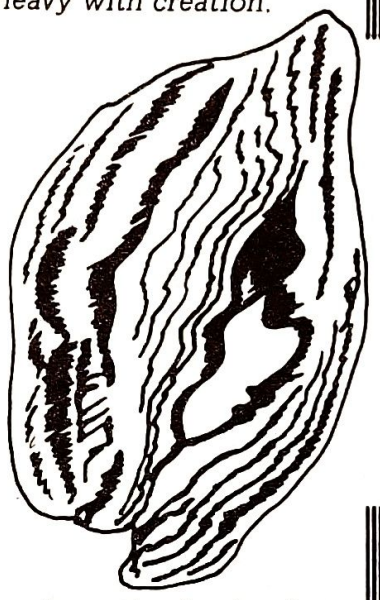
CARING FOR OURSELVES

Take time to feel. Feeling demands more of us than thought. We need room for our feelings to expand, we need strength to let them take over for a while. A fleeting thought may be of use to us, but a fleeting feeling needs to be held, allowed to grow. Take time and space to feel you.

LESBIAN LORE

When creating the world, Mawu needed to enlist the aid of Aido Hwedo the primeval serpent to hold the earth up because she had made it so heavy with creation.

COMPANION



(Latin com: with + panis: bread; see also Spanish companera)
One with whom bread is shared. Associate. Friend. One who accompanies another especially in travel. A crony.

A companionship of wimmin. A trusted sharing of ourselves, our sustenance, our journeys.

LESBIAN LORE

The uraeus serpent which emerges from the forehead as the third eye is an ancient symbol. It has recently been discovered that the pineal gland, all of whose functions are not understood, is located in this place.

WIMMIN'S WORK

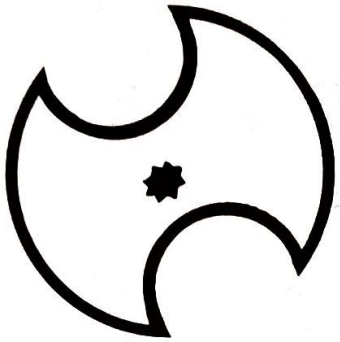
Wimmin were the builders of the great megaliths; it is said huge stones slid into place with a note of music.

Wimmin were the first builders of towns and walls. The word metropolis means, literally, mother city (from the Greek matar + polis), showing the female origin of the concept.

LESBIAN LORE

In Assam, the people live in mother-clans or "maharis". Ancestresses and living grandmothers are supreme while the youngest daughter receives the largest inheritance as the greatest duration of that generation. Only wimmin have status, possessions and children. The young and weak and helpless are protected; there is no exploitation, not even sexual. The wimmin are sexually unreserved.

An amazon is:
one who is wild and free
one who has no fear
one who does not surrender
one who is energy
one who is close to the animals
one whose ways and visions are as simple and direct as the ways of nature
one who dances the rhythm of the natural world



The amazons of Anatolia marked their labris' with the eight-pointed star of Lat/Isis in what may be a labial image.

LESBIAN LORE

The image of the labyris is 50,000 years old. There is evidence of wimmin then carrying axes. It was traditionally used by wimmin to clear land. Eleven thousand years ago, the labyris was a symbol of gynocratic power among the Lycians, Lydians, Amazons and Etruscans. The double crescents of the old and new moon form its blades.

Amethyst, a field quartz, brings light into our lives, inducing healing dreams and opening psychic centers.

LESBIAN LORE

A well-dressed Amazon of old might have been seen wearing a purple sash between naked thighs.

LESBIAN LORE

Witches are individuals who refuse to submit to the ego-restraints and self-denials necessary for social intercourse. The more desperate the longing for strict and clear hierarchies, the more threatening are witches.

VIRAGO

An amazon, a bold and quarrelsome wommon.

LESBIAN LORE

In the study of earlier matriarchies there is nothing so characteristic as the absence of external authorities. Instead a confidence in motherly justice pervades all interactions.

LESBIAN LORE

The islands off the west coast of Brittany—Sena and Isle de Sein—were both islands of wimmin, home of the Duidesses.

LESBIAN LORE

The Woman's Commonwealth was a wimmin's community formed in 1866 in a small town in Texas. They were in existence 38 years, having up to 50 members at one time. Martha McWhirter, the founder of the group was married and had 12 children, but came to believe, "It was no longer women's duty to remain with a husband who bossed and controlled her. God made man and woman equal, and to woman he has revealed his will concerning his own elect few. We are to come out and be the 'peculiar' people. "

The group lived communally, working 4 hours a day; they were totally self-sufficient, including their own dentist and shoemaker. They owned a hotel and several homes which were built and designed by the wimmin. Their three farms grew enough produce to supply their own needs as well as the hotel's guests. They were celibate. Their personal and collective processes relied on spiritual self-examination, the interpretation of dreams and visions, and their own "delicate sense".

Since ancient times, trees have symbolized life for wimmin, and the source of life, the mother. Specific trees symbolize specific things to us, and a particular tree may take on particular significance. The tree speaks to us, even guides us in her strength.

Oaks represent endurance and long life. They were sacred to the Thracians and Celtic Druids–Diana/Dana dwelling in a grove of oaks. Diana was said to favor oaks because the acorns reminded her of breasts. Oaks are also associated with divination and other "supernatural" phenomena , as in the saying, "Fairy folks are in old oaks."

Ash ensures justice and safety from evil. Its connection with water makes it useful in rainmaking and as protection against drowning. The ash, too, is associated with magic and divination.

Hawthorn is a witches' (wimmin's) tree–it detests marriage and in fact enforces chastity (with its thorns). It has been thought unlucky to bring the may blossoms indoors, but it is probably auspicious for witches to do so. The strongest magic may be experienced when standing in a circle of oak, ash and hawthorn.

Elders have meant doom to some, as witches are said to live in them. If it is necessary to cut an elder, apologize to the witch inside, saying, "Old gal, give me some of your wood, and when I'm a tree I'll give you some of mine." This is probably a good idea whenever it becomes necessary to cut a live tree.

Alders also are said to harbor witches, as they bleed red when cut.

Willow is a very prolific tree which has been endowed with wimmin's "wickedness", and related to death. It is said to be good for rheumatism, however!

Elms derive their name from "elven" and are where the elves live. What is happening to the elves as more and more elms are killed by Dutch Elm Disease?

Poplar and Aspen are borderland trees, representing with their two-color leaves the upper world of light and the under or shadow world.

Hazel is the poet's tree and contains great wisdom.

Birch is a tree encouraging new beginnings, being the first to reseed in a burned-out area, a single mother tree begetting hundreds of new saplings.

Yew are the longest lived trees, thus their association with longevity. A yew lives to be over 1000 years old; some are still living which were planted by the Druids.

Evergreen trees are our symbol of returning life, in winter, when all else appears dead.

JUSTICE (August/September)

We have days in the late summer for justice. Among us we have no laws. All requirements for communal life are reached by consensus. These are subject to change as we change, as we grow individually and collectively. In the days of justice, decisions are reached that are necessitated by new circumstances or understandings. Every wommon knows she will be heard in the decision. We enter discussions with that trust. We can be open; we can change our minds.

On the first day we gather to sing, to eat, to affirm our points of unity. Following the feasting whoever wishes to suggest a change presents it. We listen, then take time alone to reflect. When we come back together all voices are heard in the matter. If consensus is not reached when everyone has been heard, we retire again separately to reflect. Gathering together we exchange what possible resolutions we see. We continue this process until all can accept the outcome and still be true to themselves, to their needs. We do this for every concern before us. As each consensus is reached, we take time for feasting and singing and touching.

There may also be disputes among individuals. The individuals ask several others to hear their concerns. The process is then the same as for the group. We all celebrate for three more days our love for one another and our strength in difference.

IN THE BACKGROUND

Greek lore held late summer and early fall to be a time of justice. Virginal justice reigned for a month—Dike, daughter of Themis and granddaughter of Gaia, was the judge. The priestesses of Themis and Dike settled arguments among the people. The second month marked the reign of mother justice, of Themis herself, who protected the innocent and punished the guilty. This is also the time of the reign of Hecate, the fierce one who is revengeful in her passion for justice for wimmin.

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The ethic that we choose to live is inseparable from our daily life, our every action. Our lives are not something we choose to analyze (separate) and critique, but a whole even as we are a whole. Our ethic is what we do, who we are. It is not our task to integrate our beliefs/values with our thoughts/actions. Our lives are a whole. We need only listen to the demands of the whole to know what it is we must do in any situation.

LESBIAN LORE

Egyptian models of justice are derived from those of AuSet whose charge over justice insured that none need fear insolence or violence. As she dispensed justice, so one did to another. Her vision was cosmic; her care impartial.

OUR BLOOD

The power of a menstruating wommon is anarchistic. It is not the power of committee or compromise. It is a power to be used solely for a wommon's purpose. Therefore we do not mix our power with the barterings of state.

When we say we are erotic we mean we have chosen the way of life we know possible through our sexual energy. We mean we know our powers are unlimited. We mean we have within us justice, love and hope. We say we are erotic when we mean we have expected the very best and will not settle for less.

"The end never justifies the means because the means are our lives, our experience."

Dorothy Riddle, "New Visions of Spiritual Power", in Quest, vol. 4, 1975

LESBIAN LORE

The Furies or Erynines in Greece were winged wimmin with snakes entwining their bodies who defended mother-right and matriarchy. They have the power to destroy the fertility of the earth in retribution for crimes against wimmin.

"The revolutionary is one who acts as she thinks everyone must act in a good and just society."

Ti-Grace Atkinson

THE AESTHETIC/ETHIC

In our wommon's culture, the aesthetic is the ethic: our sense of beauty and order presumes our response/responsibility to ourselves, one another, the world community. Because neither our aesthetic nor our ethic stand separate from our sense of self we can know and act in accord with the organic process of the earth by acting out of our self. What we want for others is the same as what we want for ourselves; what the earth demands is the same as what we ourselves demand. Because we have an aesthetic of wholeness, our ethic demands nothing less.

The principles of this aesthetic/ethic are these:

It is always life affirming.

It is inseparable from daily life, woven into the fabric of our common tasks and aspirations.

It is conservative in the original sense, taking care that material is used without waste, that nothing is lost.

It is consistent, integral with our deep feelings.

It does not demand self-sacrifice but that each wommon become/be whom she may be.

It is internally logical; its context is its own values. It is not required to answer the dilemnas of the patriarchy.

It embraces multiformity and self determination.

An aesthetic that embraces the beauty of trees, fungus, wild flowers and herbs in a forest is one that is comfortable with the form/process of other organisms. We do not demand uniformity, but delight in the random distribution of variety. We do not insist that plants be arranged for our convenience or that only those which produce a useful (to us) product be allowed to grow. We take pleasure in birds, reptiles, and animals that share our environment but do not acquiesce to our whims. We celebrate with nature the multifarious and ingenious ways in which her purposes are accomplished, the establishment of order under no dominion but her own, the abundance of life.

We expect for ourselves what we see gives life: sunlight and rain, moon, stars and darkness, water, earth and vegetation, autonomy and interdependency. We want the freedom of the forest accepting that with it comes the vulnerabilities that all life faces: weather, predators, variables in food supply.

We further want for another what we have chosen for ourselves—the ability to adjust her patterns to those of her own longings. We have chosen the "narrow way" as we discard those accessories to a former life that we see now do not give us health. But we do not see our way, our choices, as prescriptive for all wimmin. We lovingly encourage other wimmin to live from their center, to choose for themselves what is whole.

We have not entered a private relationship with nature. We understand nature to be global if not intergalactic. Our response to nature is expressed in relationship to particular trees, animals, people, but our sense of wholeness is contingent upon the wholeness of all wimmin, all nature. Beauty is intrinsic to all whose lives are in concord. We encourage each movement toward naturalness. We gather numbers and strength in alignment with the earth. We are not afraid of our own powers. We are not embarrassed by the earth's fecundity. We are not obsessed with control. We have a sense of form, a sense of appropriateness that moves from our center. We know when something is right.

"Unless we give ourselves strong suggestions we end up being controlled and molded by the strongest suggestions made to us—from 'society' or specific people."

Peggy Allegro, "The Strange and the Familiar: The Evolutionary Potential of Lesbianism", in Lesbian Reader, Amazon Press, 1975

LESBIAN LORE

Inscription, goddess shrine, Anatolia: "I am the conscience of thine own self."

We are speaking the unspeakable. We speak of our reality, of the experiences of our bodies and minds. Our speech is made possible by our hearing—we are hearing each other. In the speaking and the hearing we are reinterpreting knowledge. We speak secrets and in so doing, we become more honest with ourselves and each other.

OUR TONGUE

We used to value being multilingual. Now we have one language that says the truth about us, which does not deny the origin or vision of any of us, which enfolds all of us together creating a new world. We stopped defending those things we perceived as "different" which really had nothing to do with our wommonselves. We have great diversity, but all variation is rooted in our lesbian identity and consciousness. Our language reflects this diversity rather than the divisiveness of old loyalties. In our language, each wommon can speak her reality, can hear herself be.

CARING FOR OURSELVES

Being "crazy" is a way of being closer to yourself than pretending/trying not to be crazy—it is self-preservation.

How we are "crazy":

We are guided by our own inner needs and intuitions.

We have ceased to conform to outer demands of rationality (their reality).

We expose ourselves, let our madness be known—we are thus open to criticism, judgement by others.

Most importantly, we are crazy enough not to care about the opinions of others.

"The function of freedom is to free somebody else."

Toni Morrison

LESBIAN LORE

In cultures that were wommon-centered the favored colors were black, white and red—colors that to this day are held to be sacred colors among people very connected to the earth.

Before a short rain, cattle and hens will take shelter. If it is to be a long rain, they will remain out and eating.

early autumn

The earth settles into its maturity. All is ripening, bearing. The vine we watched, saying "This is a squash" has become a squash, to our surprise. The apples hang heavy on the limb; the nuts fall ripe. The air has a briskness, a curtness as though its lolling sultriness were forgotten.

We have gathered the produce of the earth from every corner. Our cellars are full of roots packed in sand; dried legumes and fruits line our shelves; our granaries are full: we are content. We sing our gratitude for a good season. The richness of nature has visited our homes: the energy of the sun is stored for our use.

We are ripening and growing restless. Our faces are etched with our knowing. Our wisdom is in small pouches in our packs. The necessities have been culled from the abundance of the growth. Now we prepare to travel light. We begin our slow leave-taking.

Everything is turning. We turn with the seasons. The seed which entered the ground to yield a plant has produced more seeds of its kind. The young animals have been turned out of the nest, learning to find food and build their own homes. The leaves turn color and drop to the ground; the maple and ash keys turn in the wind.

Solemnity fills the sky. The sun rises and sets to a muted haze following a burst of brilliance. The soft greys and browns of the grasses, the shriveling vines, the duller colors of winter plummage and fur remind us that all is in transition, becoming more essential, more stark. We look on where we have been without regret. The journey we embrace is in our nature: we are going home; we are moving back into our selves.

We watch the landscape become its own silhouette, a shadow of exuberance, the meaning of it all. We visit with our mothers long dead. We have the wisdom of the years in our hands. We hold the kernels, the germ of the future. Either we or our daughters will sow it.

Our jaws are set; our teeth rattle in the cold. The sun shines little on any of us. We pulled the pod from the vine, the berry from the branch; now we too feel the harshness of the season pulling us apart, separating us into our individual little huts with their little fires. The separation always bites into us. We have been outgoing all summer: the parting is hard. Only now do we recall the violations, the slights, the breaks in trust. Before we take our leave, we heal ourselves.

We are restless, ready to move on. We feel a spark deep within us. The slowness of our movement belies the intensity we feel. Our eyes are hollow and wild. Our sparse frames walk through the dead grasses and leaves. There is much to do.

AUTUMN EQUINOX (date varies each year between September 20-23)

This day is one of balance, when light and dark are again equal, before darkness increases and nights are longer than days. Our energy is high as we harvest, gathering in the products of our labor. We store our food and our energy for the coming winter. We compost, we mulch. We return energy to the earth in thanks for her bounty. We renew energy to the earth in thanks for her bounty. We renew the soil with dancing. We sing our harvest songs. We share what we have harvested; we share our songs, our stories. We give gifts of food, we feed each other. We feast on corn, melon, squash, nuts. We press apples for cider. We fashion corn dolls from the final sheafs of corn, to be kept in our homes as a symbol of the earth's abundance. We save seeds for sowing in the spring, their presence reminding us we too may seem barren through the dark season, but there is the germ of life within us.

IN THE BACKGROUND

Autumn equinox is the witches' thanksgiving; it is the time of Kore's descent, Lucina's farewell, and the Skirophoria, the descent of the virgins to Aphrodite's sanctuary. In Mesopotamia, vulvas of lapis lazuli are presented to Ishtar. Autumn is the time of Indian wimmin's ceremonies. Iroquois wimmin do dances of "what we live on"—the wimmin's shuffle dance, the corn dance, the squash dance. They sing harvest songs, songs which are individually created and owned. Hopi wimmin separate for Lakon, the corn harvest ceremony, playing and singing in the kiva (underground holy site) and spending all night on the mesa. As the melons mature, they observe Marawa, a time of wommon's sexuality and power, demonstrated by leg markings symbolic of their menstrual periods. When the melons are drying on the vine, wimmin participate in the basket dance. All are celebrations of wommon's control of the food supply and fertility.

AUTUMN: TIME FOR...

harvesting
laughing
drying and storing food
grinding grains
breadmaking
singing
gathering firewood
wool gathering
spinning, dying wool, flax, cotton
knitting scarves and mittens
envisioning
gathering nuts
insulating our living quarters
covering the garden over with mulch

Abundant rose hips mean a hard winter.

WIMMIN'S WORK

Grinding corn is often a social event for Zuni wimmin. Each wommon brings her own sandstone or lava grinding stone—one for which she may have spent years looking. They gather to grind and sing in rhythm while some wimmin play drums. Each wommon grinds up to 25 pounds of cornmeal on a day like this.

We are full of beans.

We have free and easy parties we call bean feasts. We use beans in our fertility rites and in celebrations of our young wimmin coming into maturity. Beans carry the female principle in them. A field of beans in flower brings on a kind of lunacy.

When we plant beans we plant four times as many as we need according to an ancient formula: "One to rot and one to grow, one for the pigeon and one for the crow."

When we create rituals it is to remind us that the sum of our experiences are compounded/connected in the level of symbol. The more simple the act, the more commonly used, the deeper its significance, for example, washing, eating basic foods, touching, sleeping. Rituals create an extra-mundane space in which to experience mundane reality. In so doing they draw from the wealth of connections we make while performing these actions repetitively. The ritual has no time or space but it invokes all the times, places and people with whom this act is remembered.

We create ritual because we are restless inside. We call this "searching" or "seeking enlightenment" but we know what we seek is within us. We are aching for wholeness. Our restlessness, our spirit reminds us that "what is" is not at all that of which we know ourselves to be capable. We are charged in our tolerance, even acceptance, of limitations. We are coaxed on by our memory of the time when we were not bound—when we were/are whole.

SEEING IS BELIEVING
Envision a time of gathering together, women of all ages, all tribes, meeting, mingling, sharing food and song.

LESBIAN LORE

Images of milk and honey symbolize wimmin's rule. The honey bee lives a matriarchal life and symbolizes female principles. Beeswax candles have special power for wimmin's rituals. Milk symbolizes the nurturance of the great mother, thus cows have been revered for providing the milk of good fortume.

LESBIAN LORE

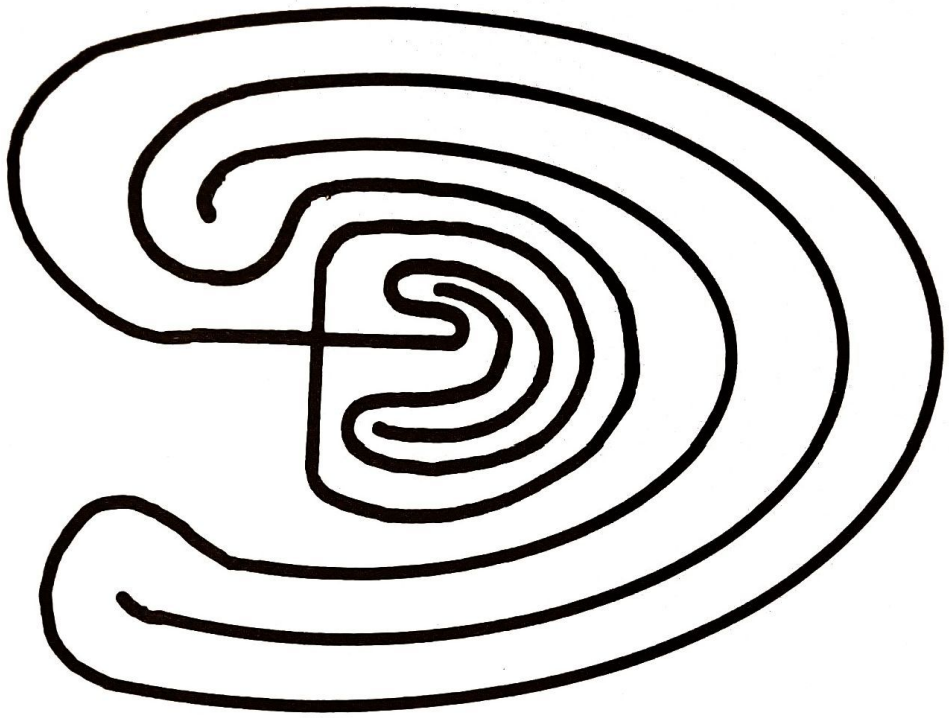
Bees, because of their identification with the matriarchal culture, were protected by law in Anatolia.

OUR BLOOD

Our blood is what unites us, defines our kinship. Wimmin who share "moontime" are kin.

CARING FOR OURSELVES

Feeling fear is necessary for our survival—we need to recognize dangerous situations. This doesn't mean we need to live in fear, letting fear be the focus of our energy or attention. We don't need to let our fear stop us from getting what we want. Confronting our fear strengthens us; transforming our fear, we are no longer controlled by it.



The labyrinth is a universal symbol for earth mother found in ruins of ancient cultures throughout the world. Its winding spiraling passage represents both life and death. It is the womb, the wrapper of our mystical center. When we find our way to the center, we make a complete turn and go out the way we came in. In so doing, we have experience of ourselves.

Changing Woman of the Navaho rubs her skin and brings forth the people.

CARING FOR OURSELVES

The more we depend on our own production for the things we need, the more vigorous we become. As more of our needs are met by people/animals/plants/the earth with whom we have a relationship, we give and receive more life in the transaction of those needs.

Recycling is a way to reclaim rather than consume the value of the earth's material.

"Help us to be the always hopeful
gardeners of the spirit
who know that without darkness
nothing will come to birth
as without light
nothing will flower"

May Sarton

To live in relationship to the earth is to take care of things, to waste nothing, to see that nothing is lost in the transmutation from its native state to that in which it is most of use. To be available oneself to the earth is the reciprocity.

LESBIAN LORE

Wild Pony of the Jicarilla Apache was given clay by a magic person and told "the clay is yours to use." To this day when she reaches the age of eight, each Jicarilla girl is given a piece of clay and told, "the clay is yours to use."

"Spirituality is so threatening because it is absolutely predicated upon self-trust."

Susan Griffin, Rape, The Power of Consciousness, Harper and Row, 1979

Fiddler crabs disappear into inland burrows two days before a hurricane.

Goats sneeze and snort before a change of weather.

LESBIAN LORE

Aruru of Babylonia is known as the potter and the shaper. Hebrew also has one word for both creation and pottery, yetzirah.

Cross-culturally many words related to wimmin have survived which not only share intimations of female power/ sovereignty but also sound alike. Here is a partial list to which you may add:
yin
gyn-
Nin
ge- (Gaia- ge: earth- geology, geography, geodesic)
queen
cwen
gen, gan, gin- (birth)

Stones are reservoirs of energy—they can help us to ground ourselves, they can help us to open and connect spiritually, they can be cooling on a warm day, warming on a cool day, and those with holes may enable us to see fairies, or make contact with hags.

People of another time collected soul stones—those stones whose special properties and shapes spoke to a person. These were hidden in a secret place, and represented the person's secret power of the self.

We carry pocket stones, smooth shapes we feel secretly, keeping us calm as we move through our day, grounding us in our real selves.

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Mosquitos in the late fall mean a mild winter.

LESBIAN LORE

Chaos. The Sea. The Deep. Tiamat was chaos, the formless one, the mother of Eros in Mesopotamia. Her name became synonymous with the primordial matter, the gaping, yawning opening through which and from which "creation" emerged. Chaos is simply matter in anarchy, not formless but evidencing a form that exceeds our control/comprehension.

LESBIAN LORE

The heyday of witchpower is what has been named the "Dark Ages". It was a time of wimmin's control of childbirth, education and knowledge, healing arts, the religion of the people.

Language does change. Match up these Old English words with their old meanings. Imagine which current English words might be obsolete in years to come! (definitions in back of book)

belly timber	kissing
cosh	twilight
dimpse	an old wommon
dringle, drubble, drumble	very angry
lip-clap	food, provisions
mubble-fubbles	out of one's mind
sparrow-fart	small cottage
thrunch	encircle
ymbe	daybreak
vecke	spend time lazily
wood	depression, melancholy

OUR TONGUE

In our language we never ask, "What do you mean?" or "What does this mean?" No word can be separated from its meaning; no word can be used in a way that is unclear to any.

We are forming a language of clarity. We only use it when we need the precision of expression it affords. We only use it for understanding. It is impossible to gain power over another by use of this tongue.

LESBIAN LORE

In Borneo wimmin serving as priestesses exercise most of the important religious functions in a language known only to wimmin.

WIMMIN'S WORK

We are the wool gatherers. We wander over the hillsides collecting bits of wool left on brambles and bushes by the sheep. We call to one another when we meet, but most of the time we are lost in our own thoughts, or found in our thoughts as seems more likely.

CARING FOR OURSELVES

Healing is a journey within oneself to reunite body, mind and spirit. The life energy connected with all living things is channeled through one so as to release blocked energy. Exercise, fresh air, sunshine, healthy diet, adequate rest, free expression of emotions all open the passages.

A heavy November snow will last until April.

LESBIAN LORE

The power of the moon is not likely to be destructive to a wommon because she has within her the qualities of the moon, the darkness and lightness. Being in relationship to the principles of her own nature, she has developed her own power and magic.

The moon is soundless; there is no air to carry sound waves.

Magma

Fluid rock beneath the crust

you call it up in me

Allowing the vent to release under pressure

the energy stored inside

purposeful turbulence without a sponsor

You say it's my core

having nothing to do with you but your witness

but the fire which precedes the lava

you have lit

a stormy night display of passion

and sparks

and the fluid core erupts

running hot over the crust

new forms forged in its rivulets

so you kick loose cinders

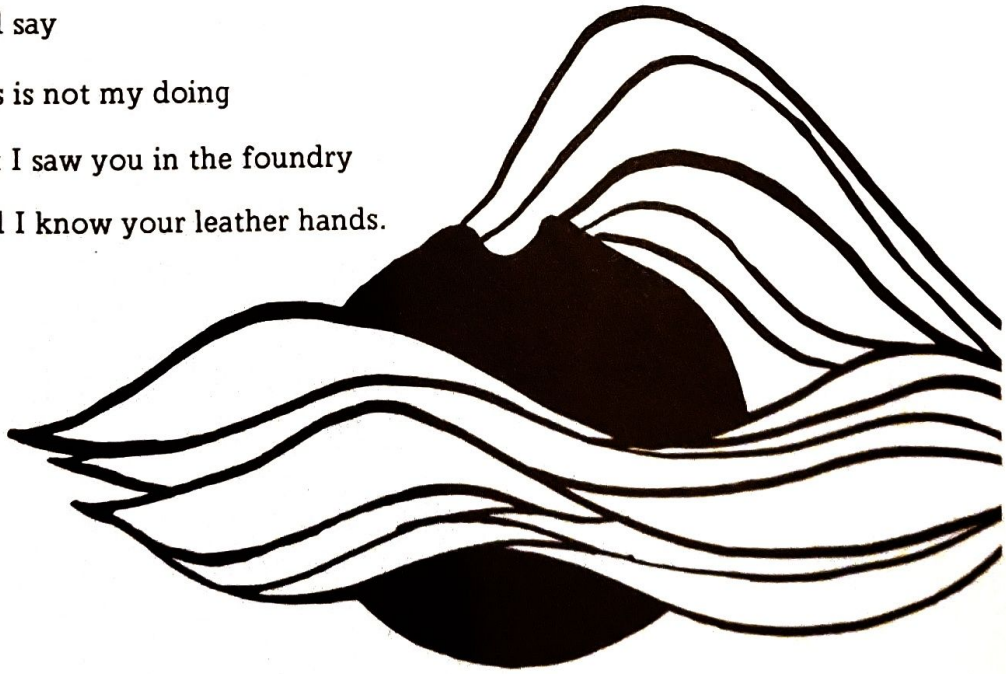
distinctly marked with your torch

and say

this is not my doing

but I saw you in the foundry

and I know your leather hands.

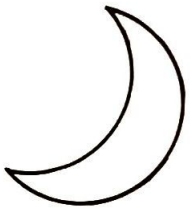


Reverence for mountains has endured the rise and fall of cultures, the usurpation of matriarchy. Each religion has its "holy mountain", the source of a great revelation. This is a remnant of the identification of mountains, especially active volcanoes, with the genitalia of wimmin, the mound of her sanctity issuing forth new life/new form with great energy. The connection survives in the name of the raised portion of a wommon's lower abdomen covered with the pubic hair: mons veneris.

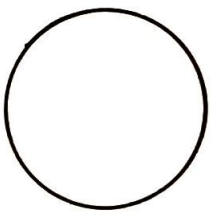
We recognize our lunar cycle–how our monthly cycle coincides with that of the moon.

The new moon is a time of darkness–for women, a time of dreams, visions and magic. We are inspired, we see the light in the darkness, we give part of ourselves to lunacy. The darkness is powerful, containing the seeds of rebirth germinating within us, containing the hope that death, destruction, sickness, will be transformed. We call on the darkness as small animals do, for peace, safety and rest. We withdraw into ourselves, as in times when menstruating women withdrew from men and village life, into huts to be with themselves and other wimmin. We nurture ourselves, preparing for the weeks ahead.

The waxing moon is a time of increase, of rising energy, of new beginnings. We dream new dreams, we reach out in mind and spirit, we move outside of ourselves. The young moon is often represented by a virgin or nymph, full of life and hope.



The full moon is our time of highest energy, of our greatest sensitivity, creativity–even madness. The mature moon is often represented by the mother in her peak of creativity and productivity. We know the full moon's light will control ovulation if we live only in natural light. Wimmin have believed that the moon will impregnate them if looked upon, and don't sleep on their backs without first rubbing spittle on their stomachs to prevent impregnation. It may be that the child's ditty, "I see the moon and the moon sees me" is part of a rite of parthenogenesis.



The waning moon is a time for finishing projects, following through on ideas, turning to oneself. Introspection leads to examining old ways and beliefs. The old moon is often represented by the crone, with all her wisdom.

NEW MOON CELEBRATION

The new moon is a time for us to withdraw as the light of the moon is withdrawn. We fast. We refrain from activity for three or four days. We have no responsibilities. Most wimmin menstruate at this time because our ovulation is regulated by the ultraviolet light of the full moon.

This is a time for justice and the seeds for the coming weeks. The Sumerians believed that destinies were fixed at this time. The weather during the fourth and fifth day after the new moon is an indicator for the coming lunar month.

When the first sliver of the moon reappears, we celebrate its return. We break our silences and greet the new moon.

"It takes a lot of time to be a genius, you have to sit around so much doing nothing, really doing nothing."

Gertrude Stein, 1937

CARING FOR OURSELVES

What we do has value; its validation is in our doing what seems good to us to do. Its value does not increase with the difficulty of achievement. When we rely on pain to give value to our efforts, we collaborate in our denial.

We learn by positive experiences. We do not need to be conditioned by avoidance. If a new awareness or insight seems painful, we need to ask how to release the barriers to self-love rather than either expecting the process to be painful or avoiding pain by denying the knowledge. We can grow through pleasure; we were intended thus to grow.

"Well, that's finished. The woman who cherished
her suffering is dead. I am her descendent
I love the scar tissue she handed on to me
but I want to go on from here with you
fighting the temptation to make a career of pain."

Adrienne Rich, Dream of a Common Language, Norton, 1978

SILENCE

Silence is its own form. It is not a negation or absence of sound; before the word, the naming, there was silence. Before each subsequent and consequent word there is silence. Silence exists both when words are absent and when they are present, beyond the words. "It has a presence/ it has a history/a form."

Adrienne Rich, Dream of a Common Language, Norton, 1978

While sound is confined to sensation—auditory and vibratory—silence is experienced on many planes. It is usually the level of sensation in which we speak of silence, and then as an absence, but what do you call the kind of silence one experiences standing alone in the full dark of night or the kind of silence experienced between companions when any combination of words would underrepresent the occasion, so the silence is shared? What do you call that pause of sound and breath simultaneous within a whole crowd when something of import transpires? What do you call the continued struggle of those who have never spoken on their own behalf yet persevere? Silence is a potentiality, a force that weaves together the illimitable in our experience, those things which cannot be defined by boundaries. As such, it is both the frontier of our knowing and source of new emergence.

As wimmin we know much that is incomprehensible within any form other than silence. Poetry and laughter and music can only approximate what we are capable of feeling. Keening and shouting extend but do not encompass all we would express. To know our silence is to open ourselves to fuller interpretations of what we mean. To know and share silence with one another is an affirmation of the powers we are just beginning to explore.

When we move into our own boundary ground, our own experience beyond the limits, we can/will meet other wimmin in new context. Refusing what closes us off from ourselves, we refuse labels that close us off from one another. That is not to disown our differences, our histories, our values. That is not to say we all become alike or wonderfully understanding or tolerant. But we will not be lost to one another defending names for us we did not give ourselves.

Silence is what exists behind, before, and under all naming. It is "broken" by naming of what has never been experienced before as it becomes familiar. By refusing to move on and name we are caught inert; by taking the new in, we are free to see further boundaries, to live with silence again, to return to the openness.

"If there's no dancing at the revolution, I'm not coming."

Emma Goldman

LESBIAN LORE

The weapons of an Amazon are her Sagaris or double-edged axe, her pelta—a five-day-old-moon shaped shield, her bow and arrows and a short sword.

LESBIAN LORE

The Valkyries were thirteen armoured Amazon maidens in Germany who were the dispensers of destiny.

LESBIAN LORE

Medusa was a queen of the Gorgons, one of the North African Amazon tribes that did not align with Atlantis. These wimmin wore their kinky hair natural, giving birth to the stories of heads of snakes when they met the Romans. Representations of the Gorgon head with serpents continued to be worn by wimmin as a protection sign.

"Look the world in the face with a go-to-hell look in the eyes; have an idea; speak and act in defiance of convention."

Margaret Sanger's advice to wimmin

When we say we create energy we mean we transform the energy around us into creative energy.

"Love of self for self is the creative force of the universe Desire is the primal energy, and that energy is erotic."

Starkawk, Spiral Dance, Harper and Row, 1979

LEFT HAND/RIGHT HAND

For all but a few of us our left and right hands are unequal. More of us find we write, eat, do precise movements with our right; a minority of us favor the left. If everything from school desks to appliance controls did not enforce right-handedness, would the distinction disappear? If we could be more in touch with choosing a hand for each task, would both hands develop equal strength and dexterity (the word itself comes from the right side!)?

For those who believe in the differentiated hemispheres of the brain, the left brain (analytic) governs the right hand and the right brain (intuitive) the left hand. Could it be our hands are specialized, meant to do different things? The words associated with left and right might bear this out: left—sinister, ominous, awkward, magic powers, receptive/passive; right—moral, accurate, external powers, active. Left is usually associated with the female and right with the male. The negative connotations of leftness and the attempt to make righthandedness unanimous may have to do with the fear of wimmin's powers, especially those of the right brain. Next time you cut with a scissors, think about that.

YONI

A sanskrit word for altar, sacred place. A symbol of the female organ of generation as an object of veneration. In nature worship all natural orifices were reverenced as representing the yoni of the mother earth/goddess.

"Who are we when we're finally safe with our own kind?"

Susan Griffin, Rape, The Power of Consciousness, Harper and Row, 1979

When we give our power, our energy, we are nurturing without limiting, caring without controlling. This is true of our relationships with each other, with nature, with the earth.

When we give, our giving is a part of who we are, a part of our way of being, and we are not diminished by it. We share ourselves as a plant gives of its seeds.

When we give, we do so from our own abundance. Our giving is not sacrificial or obligatory—when we are full, we spill over.

When we are in need, we are nurtured without being controlled, we are cared for without feeling powerless. We are cradled in plenty, we feel no guilt, for our abundance does not create scarcity in others. Receiving, our power and energy grow. In ourselves we are strong, with each other we are stronger.

Together, we create more energy—our possibilities are limitless. We have always known we could relate this way.

LESBIAN LORE

In Central Europe, Libussa and Baleska were reputed to be wimmin's states. The free and easy life of the inhabitants of these states came to be known as Bohemian, a name ever since applied to any "unconventional" lifestyle, especially that of artists and musicians.

LESBIAN LORE

Natalie Barney, an American in Paris, had wimmin gathering at her home every Friday night for 60 years—a kind of "coffeehouse", with concerts, poems, essays—a beginning of lesbian culture.

OUR BLOOD

If you crave sweets before your period, switch from sodium to potassium salt to restore your potassium balance.

At the onset of menstruation, take extra calcium (with Vitamin D and magnesium) to help with cramps.

LESBIAN LORE

The Spartans from whom "Doric" culture was derived were entirely matriarchal. Wimmin conducted all important matters of state and were not bound by marriage. The culture was remarkably non-materialistic. Money was dishonorable to talk about or think about. The Spartans did not engage in trades. Only the foreigners who lived among them did so and amassed great fortunes.

The Spartans themselves lived simply, eating only blood soup and barley bread. Everyone enjoyed and participated in music, poetry, song, calisthenics and hunting. Life was meaningful and free of purpose. The people paid special attention to idleness.

"For none shall die who have the future in them"

Meridel LeSueur, Crusades, 1955

WIMMIN'S WORK

"My work . . . a longed for bed which I enter gracefully and from which I rise up empowered."

Audre Lorde, Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power, Out & Out Books, 1978

late autumn

ALL HALLOW'S EVE (October 31)

A holy night: we are closest to the world of the spirit, most in tune with our own spirit. A magic night: we create illusions, changing reality by our dress and our manner. As the night progresses we shed our dress, our illusions, and dance naked before the fire. The worlds of matter and spirit merge.

We eat red food, drink of the red grapes. In the seeds of apple and pomegranate we see that fruit becomes seed, seed ripens into fruit. We know that in every ending there is a new beginning. We circle with lighted torches, feeling the endless cycle of death and regeneration. We mourn the passing of the sun, the withering of the grass, the death of loved ones. We celebrate the phoenix rising from the ashes, our own life and creativity.

IN THE BACKGROUND

Halloween is associated with the witch, the hag, the crone, and especially the dark goddess, Hecate. Hecate is of the underworld; she represents destruction, she represents renewal, she holds the wisdom of the ages. She goddess of the crossroads of light and dark, life and death.

Halloween and the first two days of November have traditionally been days of remembering the dead. Greek wimmin stored corn seed in pots the seed representing the souls of the dead; for three days, the pot was uncovered, and the ghosts were with the living. Druids feared the dead who appeared on Halloween, and gathered together, not daring to sleep.

"I give you seeds of a new way
I give you the moon shining on a fire of singing women
I give you the sound of our feet dancing
I give you the sound of our thoughts flying . . . "

Chrystos "Ceremony for Completing a Poetry Reading", in This Bridge Called My Back Moraga and Anzaldua eds. Persephone 1981

A witch is one who has power over her own life.
one who makes her own rules
one who refuses to submit to self-denial
one who recognizes no authority with a greater esteem than her own, who is more loyal to self than to any abstraction
one who is untamed
one who says "I am a witch" aloud three times
one who transforms energy
one who can be passionate about her ideals/values as they are changing
one who is explosive, whose intensity is like volcanoes, floods, wind, fire
one who is disorderly, chaotic
one who is ecstatic
one who alters reality

LESBIAN LORE

To "sleep like a log" means a witch had been with her coven that night placing a log in her bed so she would not be missed.

HAG

(Middle English hagge: witch, from Middle High German hag: hedge or wood, or from Greek hagios holy)
An old wommon. A wise wommon. A wommon of the woods, wild, strange, unsociable. A fury. A night rider, she goes on her mare—the nightmare.

It's not the evil inside ourselves we fear; it's the good, the good being so demanding.

LESBIAN LORE

A nightmare is a visit from a very powerful wommon. Often she sits on the chest of her victim causing a feeling of suffocation and oppression. She will leave when she pleases.

Suggestions coming to us by telepathy have made their entrance to the soul through the aura having been pierced from within by fear or desire.

WIMMIN'S WORK

Our work is transformation–creating form from energy, making something out of nothing.

"Magic is the art of changing consciousness at will."

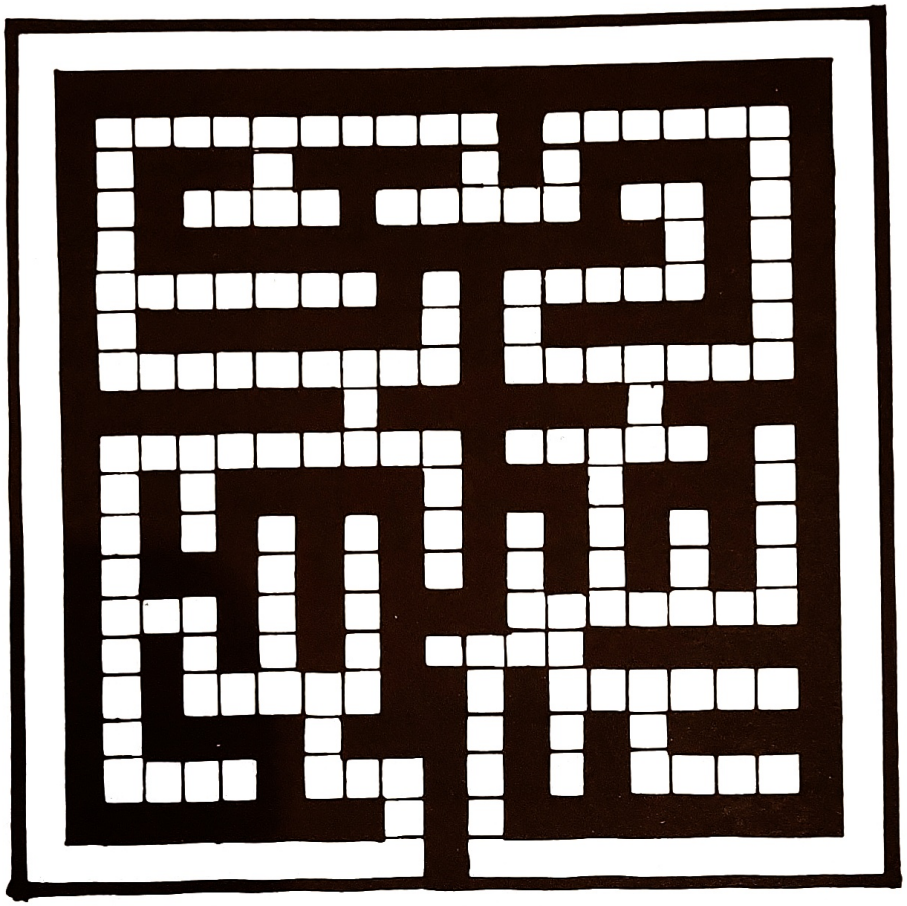
Starhawk, Spiral Dance, Harper & Row, 1979

Between the night and the dawn, the wolf hours are the time of discontent. Most children are born and the greatest number of people die at this time This is when sleep is the deepest (REM), bad dreams and appearances b ghosts and demons most common. Cells divide, norepinephrine produc tion peaks, gastric acid increases, blood sugar is lowest, as is one's immunity and gamma globulin. Because the secretion of adrenalin has not yet begun to rise, one's sensory keenness is most acute. This is the time of agitation for new experience countered by a protection of self, an assertion against unknowns.

"As the warmth of the earth receded, they would need to seek out warmth in each other more."

Elana Dykewoman, They Will Know Me By My Teeth, Megaera Press, 1976

Red is a strong and lucky color, given to the world by lightning. Fire is stored in trees that grow red flowers or red berries in spring or whose leaves turn red in the fall, according to Chinese lore.



LESBIAN LABYRINTH

Make up words to fill the spaces in the labyrinth, using the definitions provided and those you invent. Any word may go in any space.

term for someone who cares for you
high, feeling good
sorrow
hut,dwelling place
ancient song, passed along and added to a sexual courship dance
hammock-like sling for hanging in tree
simple bread
greeting
chant the wimmin do as the sun sets each day

what you say when you drop something
love-making
doing nothing, idle
festival
bellies together
one's sense of personal space
stone for grinding grain to meal
little bag for carrying things
long embrace, cuddling
to throw everything up for grabs, make changes

"As long as you remember who you are you'll never be lost. You'll find peace within yourself."

Margaret Vickers in I Am the Fire of Time Jane Katz ed. Dutton 1977

Totem comes from the Ojibway ototeman, which means literally "derivation in the female line". Totem poles trace this descent through the guardians or animal spirits of these wimmin.

LESBIAN LORE

In matriarchal cultures usually only wimmin were buried; the remains of others were piled outside the city gate. Only wimmin were permitted to grieve as everything born belonged to them.

LESBIAN LORE

The Natiatu were Babylonian priestesses 3500 years ago who lived in communities of wimmin, choosing not to marry.

OUR BLOOD

When all wimmin menstruated at the new moon, they separated themselves from the non-menstrual community to spend time alone/together in a place visited only by them at this time. They lived simply without responsibility to any but themselves during moon time.

LESBIAN LORE

Morgan le Fay lived in a palace on a crystal mountain on an island in a lake with 10,000 wimmin yet it was visible to very few.

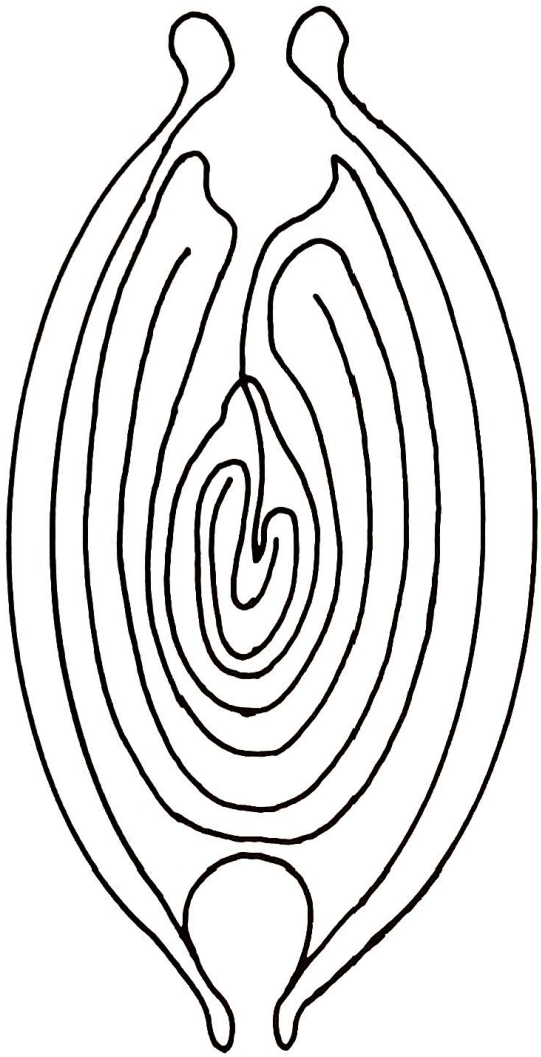
LESBIAN LORE

Olympia refused marriage to the Emperor of Byzantium in the fourth century to head a community of wimmin.

SEEING IS BELIEVING
Envision a world where you go as you please never having to make excuses for not going where you don't want to go and not having to hold back from doing what you really want to do or having to explain what you do.

"When one dreams of a new world, this world immediately becomes possible."

Susan Griffin, Rape, The Power of Consciousness, Harper and Row, 1979



Labia. the lip, the arch to passage. the entrance/the exit. the beginning/the end. birth and death. the womb/the tomb—the earth mother. the labyrinth. the double edge. the place of knowing/the place of knowing oneself. entering/spinning/returning to oneself. clearing of illusions. the labyris. first crescent of the moon/last crescent. the double crescents of the vulva/lips of knowing and protection.

At times it seems we're in the dark, feeling our way. We trust that the dark is safe. The darkness is not emptiness, but is the dark of the new moon anticipating the full, or of the seed in darkness germinating. The dark is full of potential—it is there we are creating our lives anew.

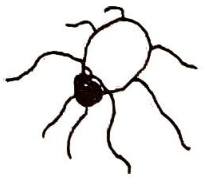
SPINDLE

(Greek spinnan: spin, same root as for spider)

The fates who spin the thread of life or destiny. An axis upon which something turns or revolves. The third swarm of bees to leave a hive to form a new one. The stalk on which flowers are formed on flowering plants. Relations on the mother's side are spindle kin.

When Spider Woman of the Pueblos had created people with the help of her two daughters, she attached a delicate thread from herself to the top of each person's head as a passageway to herself which can be kept open by chanting through it. This thread is part of the Web of Destiny and those whose doorway is open know which way to travel.

"Spiders are patient weavers.
They never give up.
And who knows
What keeps them at it?
Hunger, no doubt,
And hope."

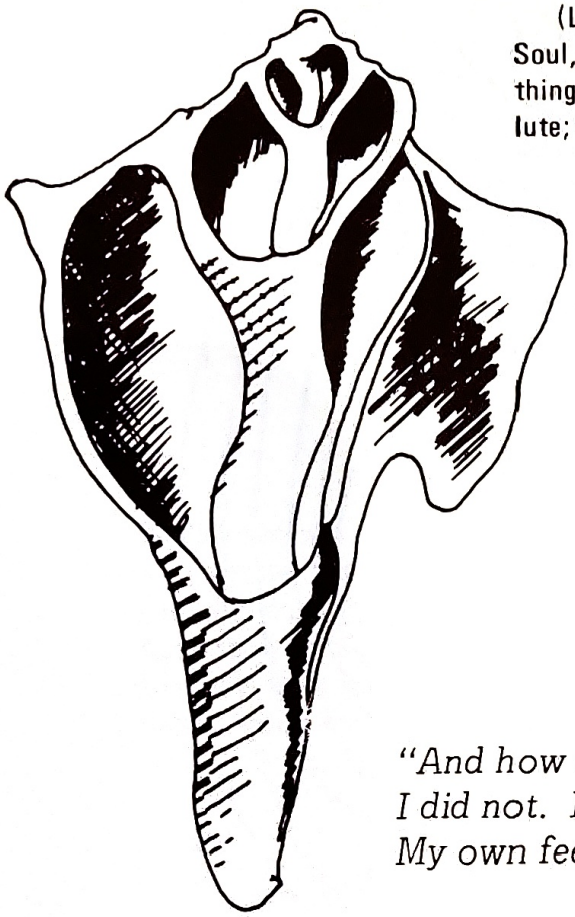


May Sarton, Halfway to Silence, Norton, 1980

WIMMIN'S WORK

Knotting is a wommon's healing art. Because a thread runs universally through all events tying them together in various patterns, fate can be sealed off at the vulnerable points of its course, stopped, turned, averted.

ESSENCE



(Latin esse: to be)
Soul, spirit. Something that makes something what it is, intrinsic nature. Absolute; complete. We are essential.

"And how did you find out the truth?
I did not. I only stopped hearing lies.
My own feelings became too loud."

Susan Griffin, Like the Iris of
An Eye, Harper and Row, 1976

OUR TONGUE

We do not translate our language into any other "language". There is no correlation or core relation. All of us understand our language intuitively. We find it cannot be taught otherwise.

○ ○ ○

Solitude is the same as having enough. We each know a completeness in ourselves: we are at home; we are enough. We are at peace when we feel deeply connected to ourselves. We are healed by our sense of sufficiency.

We seek solitude, this oneness/completeness within the self, when we feel drained, when we feel diminished by all that attempts to separate us from ourselves. We know we are healed by taking our self for our self, not hoarding or withholding our presence from others, but expecting them to reach the same content within themselves.

Herbs to carry with us:
whole nutmeg–sends good vibrations, absorbs bad
rosemary–keeps us safe on our journey
fern seed gathered at Midsummer–ensures invisibility
artemesia (wormwood, mugwort)–protects traveler, counteracts poison, stimulates dreaming
horseradish leaves (in our shoes)–stimulate tired feet

"she thinks perhaps a time will come
when it will not be so necessary
to travel on the dark edge of things . . . "

Martha Courtot, Tribe, Pearlchild, 1977

They had "no ownership whereby that which was owned could be manipulated beyond its face value . . . but they had a sense of 'mineness', security, the full use of, if they were reasonable and moderate, not asking more than the need."

Alice Malloy, In Other Words, Woman's Press Collective

CARING FOR OURSELVES

The names by which we know ourselves are relational, not absolute. If we are caring, nurturing, kind, sensitive, strong, fierce, loving, we use these words as descriptive, not prescriptive of how we must be in every circumstance. To understand myself as a nurturer I must understand nurturing as a choice I make from time to time. I cannot always be nurturing and be myself. I cannot always be kind. I cannot always be strong.

Our memory is holographic: each cell contains the whole; each cell is capable of reconstituting the whole. In each of our cells all we ever knew as wimmin is present. The more we act on the truth about ourselves within us, the more we remember, do naturally. We do not wait until cataclysmic events permit the implementation in total of our vision; we begin now with what we know, what is possible.

CRONE DAYS (November-December)

East Indian/Hindu wimmin, usually past menopause, withdraw from their obligations and gather together for thirty-five days called Habisha in the fall of the year.

With Autumn's increasing darkness, we become more of our female selves– we are cool, shady, night-time creatures. We encourage our crones and the crones within each of us. We know the community's need for wimmin of all ages and abilities. In the waning of the year we come together to remember. We gather to hear the stories we all have to tell: those who have experienced more have more to tell, but all share. We laugh much. Some stories bring tears of respect as we witness the strengths of us and the struggles we have endured. We exchange "grandmother gifts", thoughtful deeds or materials we give to others as we perceive their use for them. Anyone may give a gift to anyone else; we do so without thought of return.

We bring our medicine pouches and share what we know of healing, what we have gathered, what we have learned to do. We share how we are healing our pain, how we leave behind suffering, how we soothe any wrongs done us or by us the past year. We care for one another, responding to one another's needs. We make sure everyone has enough firewood, enough clothing, plenty of yarn and other materials for our crafts. We secure shelters, repair tools. One by one we retreat into our separate ways. So these days end.

"They are together to perform a ceremony. Rituals of wimmin take time. There is no hurry; time stands still."

Beth Brant "Indigenous Acts",
in Sinister Wisdom 17

We share stories of our past, our origins, how we came to be here together. We tell our stories over and over to one another because each time we tell them we have grown: we see things differently, we remember other parts. In telling these stories from a new perspective we can incorporate those experiences into our changing reality. We take as given that the ending or outcome may change in the process of retelling. We tell the stories over and over until they reflect our sense of self, become a part of lesbian consciousness. How we want our stories to turn out becomes/is true. What we choose, what we would have done as strong wimmin produces growth in our community. We do not tell stories to aggrandize or distinguish ourselves; we tell stories to share how we see ourselves, how we see the world, how we envision the future. We are brought together by each wommon's stories.

We are wild.

We are not submitting to control.

We are uncontrollable.

We are unconstrained, unrestrained, unchecked, unprevented, unhampered, unhindered, unobstructed, unrestricted, unconfined, untrammeled, uncaught, untamed, unbound, unaccountable.

We are unlimited.

We are self-willed, acting freely.

We are turbulent, raging.

We are enthusiastic, passionate.

We are going beyond reason. We are bewildered but we are not confused.

We are going wild.

We discovered we had erotic feelings that were so powerful our world could be changed. We use these powers without fear because since they come from our deepest female self we trust them completely.

"They say we do not occupy a part of time, that each of our lives is a consciousness which extends through the whole of time. Each of our consciousnesses is a way of knowing, a knowledge, a conception of the whole of time. Therefore there are many times, not one. Therefore we are each elder to the other."

River Malcolm 'The Women Talk About How They Live', in Sinister Wisdom 3

CARING FOR OURSELVES

We cannot reverse what has caused us pain, but we can refuse to be hurt by it repeatedly. Pain and hurt are not emotions. By naming the outrage, the anger, the fear, we are closer to the end or our oppression.

"Even the act of naming our suffering as oppression transformed us. The more we believed we did not like suffering, the less we found suffering . . . tolerable. We allowed our anger over the infliction of pain to be expressed and in that expression found more of the truth of our feelings." (Susan Griffin, Rape; The Power of Consciousness, Harper and Row, 1979)

"You can withstand an infinite amount of pain as long as you can sing."

Elana Dykewoman, They Will Know Me By My Teeth, Megaera Press, 1976

We are healed by our visions, as we discard what is, create what might be. As we are healed (become more of our wommonselves) our visions widen. Our visions are a framework within which to move, one which changes as we move, as we envision new possibilities.

LESBIAN LORE

African wimmin's prayer to the moon: "May our lives be renewed as yours is."

WIMMIN'S WORK

Wimmin are healers, channeling life energy, through our connection to all living things. Wimmin were the first alchemists, hermetics, practicing simpling: the brewing and distilling of herbs or simples.

COMFORT

(Latin con or cum + fort: strong together, completely strong)
We seek comfort—comfort in the sense of strength.
Our comfort is the source of our strength.
Our comfort—when we are at rest, in idleness, content
Our comfort—when we are at home, at ease, safe
Our comfort—when we are open, unmasked, loved
Our comfort—when we revel in our senses, hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, touching, those things that bring us pleasure
Our comfort—when we are encouraged, inspirited by each other
Our comfort/our strength

"The acceptance of our present condition is the only form o extremism which discredits us before our children."

Lorraine Hansberry

Meridel LeSueur says that those who think linearly think they can get away from the consequences of their actions—run straight away, leaving the mess behind. Those who realize that all is circular—the earth, the seasons—know that their shit will catch up with them—it always comes around again.

WIMMIN'S WORK

Wimmin learn wimmin's work within the community of wimmin.

LESBIAN LORE

A horseshoe over the door is universally understood as a yoni, or female genital, a symbol for good luck.

LESBIAN LORE

In autumn, Eskimo wimmin and children play cat's cradle. With string looped from their fingers, they weave patterns to "tangle the sun" and delay its disappearance.

We play a game with a group of wimmin to form our own language. We make up words that sound interesting to us, then each wommon writes a "definition" for that word. We then read all the definitions and include them as the various meanings of that word.

Here are some examples from one night:

enrazzle: brightening within
to immerse another wommon in joyful, playfulness . . . just for the fun of it.
to unlayer the folds of despair and, in doing so, sparkle the self to a new center
to cause one to see beguiling new things because of the dimness of all things past

wobark: the sounds or noises wimmin make; wimmin sounds that are non-verbal
the collective cry of sisters in pain
ceremony asking a tree to give herself for the needs of other creatures
to grow in layers with the roughness outside so that what is new is imperceptible

Here are some words to get started:

cistra	zoh	negisi
eudza	youm	ky
brieg	corande	taeva
rurr	etln	hulf

When we say "we know" we mean it has come to us through our female erotic power. We know through our core of passion, our source of intuitive reason. We have learned to trust this knowledge above all else. We have never been deceived. The life force within us will not be diminished; we grow more and more powerful; we grow more and more alive. We become intolerant of any denial of our fullness. We are becoming our selves—bigger selves than we ever supposed we could be.

"I know it is time to dream strong dreams and then to abandon them for dreams to come."

Barbara Starrett, "I Dream in Female: The Metaphors of Evolution", in Lesbian Reader, Amazon Press, 1975

DECLARATION OF INTENTIONS (The Little Lesbians Who CAN)

If we believe in it, we CAN do it. If we want it, it will happen.

We CAN relate to one another differently in wimmin's space, where we give priority to ourselves and to each other.

We CAN get along, there is harmony.

We CAN cooperate—we don't need conflict, struggle, competition, power over each other.

We CAN have equality—we don't need hierarchies. Leadership can emerge in different areas at different times due to different skills.

We CAN make group decisions, working things out to suit all, developing a common concern or ideology.

We CAN have only what we create—any structure or order we choose will be of our own creation.

We CAN tolerate, accept, grow with differences.

We CAN have togetherness without sacrificing individual uniqueness—we don't all have to be the same.

We CAN figure out how to best utilize our differences—no one way is best.

We CAN support each other without assuming approval.

We CAN hear each others' needs. Our care and concern for each other can be more important than our differences.

We CAN seek what we want for ourselves and still be responsive to others. Our self-realization depends on our relationships with others.

We CAN have open, honest, authentic relationships.

We CAN live with song and dance and laughter.

We CAN live in tune with the 'natural order'.

We CAN live our values.

We CAN make a commitment to each other, to our values, to the land, which will add meaning to our lives.

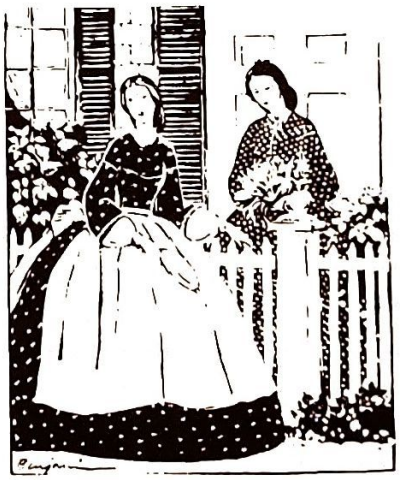
We CAN live so that what we want to do is the same as what we have to do.

"As a woman's real power grows and her knowledge widens, ever the way she can follow grows narrower: until at last she chooses nothing, but does only and wholly what she must do."

Ursula Le Guin

We are indebted to the following wimmin, whose books we used extensively in piecing together our lesbian lore:

Merlin Stone, When God Was a Woman, Dial, 1976
Ancient Mirrors of Womanhood, vol. 1 & 2, New Sibylline Books, 1979
Esther Harding, Woman's Mysteries, Harper and Row, 1971
Helen Diner, Mothers and Amazons, Anchor, 1973
Elizabeth Gould Davis, The First Sex, Putnam, 1971
Z. Budapest, The Feminist Book of Lights and Shadows, Luna Pub., 1976



"Failure is impossible"

Susan B. Anthony

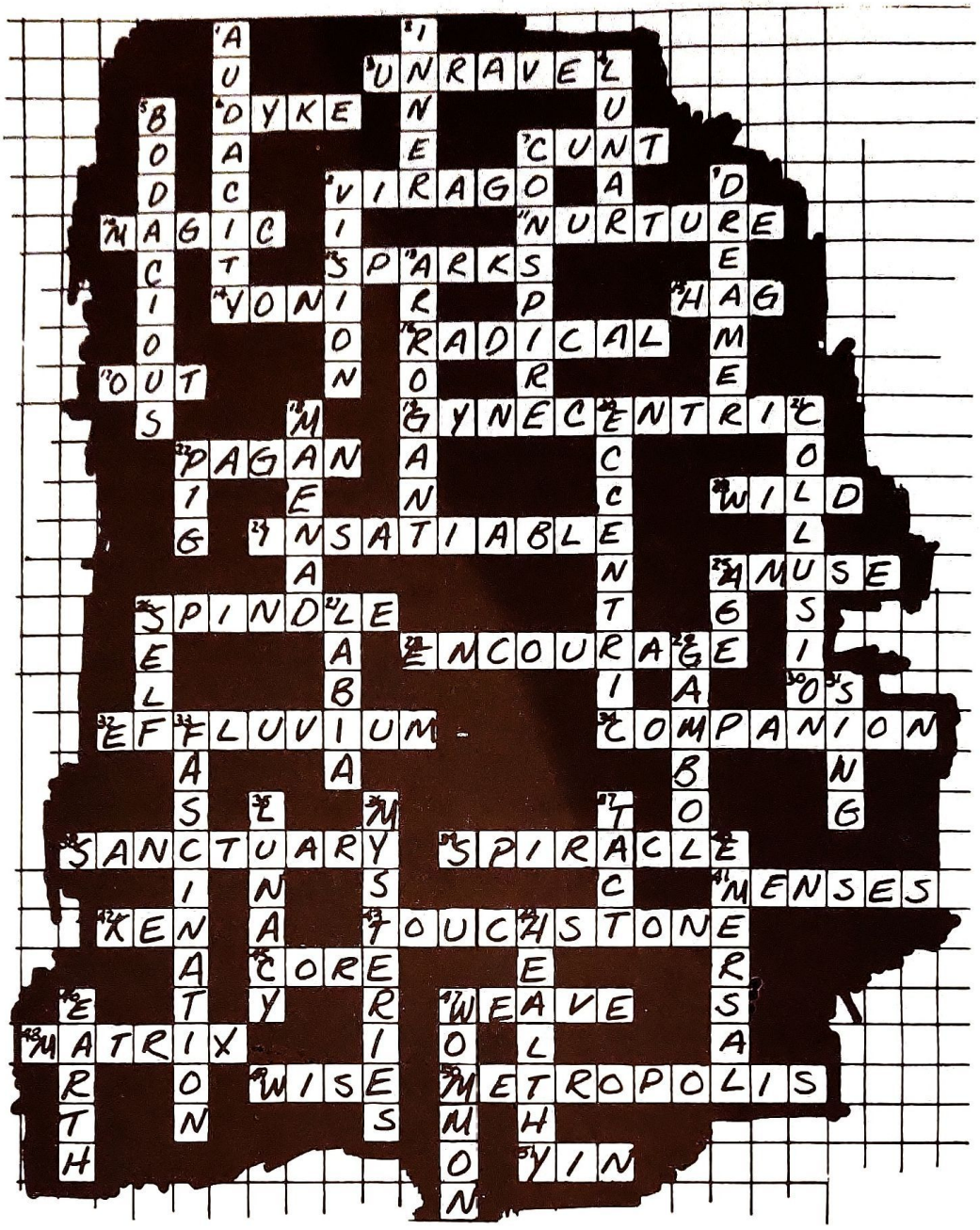
Our reality, our lesbian consciousness, is a web of new meanings, new words, new forms. We are creating a conscious identity, we are creating a space for ourselves, we are creating something to believe in. It is of our own making—no one can tell us what it should be. It reflects who we are at the core, it contains that which sustains us. We weave it from our joys and triumphs, from the life force within us. We need this web to fall into, we need to be sure it is there. We need to know we are not alone, we need to know who we are when we are alone. It is a process—we will never be "done". The spinning itself will be enough—it will be a healing, giving us back our life and our meaning.

The next edition of The Almanac of Lesbian Lore and Vision will be pieces of your wimmin's knowledge and imagination. Send us stories and dreams, your work and your play, words and visions

Word Weavers
Box 8742
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55408-0742

"The truth could be made up if you know how. And that's the truth."

Lily Tomlin



OLD ENGLISH

belly timber: food, provisions
cosh: small cottage
dimpse: twilight
dringle, drubble, drumble: spend time lazily
lip-clap: kissing
mubble fubbles: depression, melancholy
sparrow-fart: daybreak
thrunch: very angry
ymbe: encircle
vecke: an old wommon
wood: out of one's mind

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